

THE
HOUSE
OF
RIMMON

MRS Coulson
Kernahan

History of a Woman

Millin's New Novel Built Around Heroine With the Snob Complex

BY GLENN. By Sarah G. Millin.
New York: Boni & Liveright. \$2.

Reviewed by WALTER YUST

RS. MILLIN'S "God's Stepchildren" enjoys the distinction of brevity and directness. And no mean distinction, for it signifies that a novelist is something to say, and indulges in no stilted sidling, no glitter of rhetorical locution, to say it.

Millin is an expert hewer to the bone. She ignores the chips—whereas it is fashion (among those who rather grope for novels than find them) to utilize them all. One expects her novels to be surfaced, firm. One looks for no more; because, and somewhat paradoxically, she discards what is superfluous. It comes as a refreshing departure (and appears to be another paradox).

"Mary Glenn" is of less circumscribed dimensions than "God's Stepchildren." "God's Stepchildren" presents a problem in race and class. "Mary Glenn" presents difficulties that might follow in the life of any one. Mary Glenn is a young woman who aims to be something more than she is. The world is not because we aim to catch a little more than we have, and so do we. That's right. But the moment we parade, we are up unnatural exteriors, we find ourselves in an absurd, often tragic state. We are an exterior striding off ahead of us in a suit of clothes walking a



Albion

Read in London
1 December 1881

To Mother

From her affectionate Brother

James

26 Lynwell Place

30/11/01

Miss Conlson Kernahan
is the wife of my
mother's first cousin
she is also a writer

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

FRANK REDLAND, RECRUIT

SOME PRESS OPINIONS

Literary World.—"A charming story delightfully told. The climax is worthy of any recent novel, while the conclusion is masterly. Fanchette is an exquisite witch."

World.—"Remarkably well drawn. The idea of this animated and attractive story is new and romantic. Fanchette wins all hearts."

Echo.—"Mrs. Kernahan has a keen eye for character, and all her *dramatis personæ* are vitalized by an adroit association of sympathy and humour. Fanchette is quite delightful."

Christian World.—"Fanchette is a perfectly charming creation. The atmosphere of the story is as fresh and sweet as a woodland dell in primrose time. It is in Fanchette, however, that the author has achieved her most undoubted success. The book will certainly add greatly to the writer's already high reputation."

St. James's Budget.—"We welcome Fanchette as a delightful addition to the roll of the heroines of fiction. As fresh, frank, and buoyant as the heroine of 'Under Two Flags.'"

Lloyds.—"For one thing alone, apart from the general merit of the work, Mrs. Kernahan's book would be welcome—the creation of such a charming character as Fanchette. She captivates the reader at once. It is far and away the best book Mrs. Kernahan has produced, and can be heartily recommended as a fascinating and romantic novel."

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

TREWINNOT OF GUY'S

SOME PRESS OPINIONS

Speaker.—"A writer so gifted with racy humour, keen observation, and vigorous eloquence, Mrs. Kernahan possesses not only these agreeable qualities, but the more solid virtues of sympathetic insight, tender pathos, and an intimate knowledge of the hearts of men and women. 'Trewinnot of Guy's' is in many respects a notable novel."

World.—"The story teems with incident. Every personage is a character, and it would be impossible to deny their cleverness, or the perceptive powers which they reveal. The hero, Trewinnot himself, is admirably drawn. The enthusiastic young student, at once light-hearted and earnest, with his capacity for whole-souled devotion, and his enjoyment of 'a lark,' could hardly be better done. This breezy and attractive personality dominates the whole style of the book."

Daily News.—"It is a well-written, well-constructed story. Mrs. Kernahan seems to be familiar with her subject, and with a light and firm touch she weaves her thread of humour and tragedy as she depicts the manners of a profession that perhaps more than any other comes in contact with human nature as it is. Trewinnot is a pleasant hero. Headlong, sincere, and capable, he is very much alive."

Saturday Review.—"There are touches of genuine observation in the book—the routine of an over-worked doctor practising in a poor London district, for instance. We feel that the author is here at home with her subject."

Academy.—"It brings Bob Sawyer and Ben Allen up to date."

Sketch.—"Mrs. Coulson Kernahan's pictures of medical student life, of doctors, dispensers, *locum tenens*, are admirable."

THE HOUSE OF RIMMON.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Cloth gilt.

TREWINNOT OF GUY'S.

Cloth gilt.

FRANK REDLAND, RECRUIT.

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"'I say Kizzy,' remarked Hackbit . . . 'I wanted a wife, not a
Sister of Mercy!'" Page 122.

The House of Rimmon.]

[*Frontispiece.*

THE HOUSE OF RIMMON

*A STORY OF THE 'BLACK COUNTRY' OF
SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE*

BY

MRS. COULSON KERNAHAN

AUTHOR OF 'TREWINNOT OF GUY'S,' 'FRANK REDLAND, RECRUIT,' ETC.

'The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together.'

LONDON

WARD, LOCK & CO., LIMITED

WARWICK HOUSE, SALISBURY SQUARE, E.C.

NEW YORK AND MELBOURNE



PR
4839
K45951
1889

THE HOUSE OF RIMMON.

CHAPTER I.

A HOUSE DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF.

ALL men live by philosophy ; but few are conscious of the fact. The philosophy of most men has not been gathered from books or gentle word-teachings, but is largely the result of kicks and buffetings. These the young at first look upon with amazement, as well as horror. Later on, their chief concern is how to avoid ills, and bear those they can't avoid ; and this is philosophy.

Every child is an embryo philosopher. Even with the baby it is a question of—does it pay or does it not pay ? Before he is possessed of teeth he has probably learnt whether his tears or his patience is the likelier to move the heart of his nurse ; and his conduct is regulated accordingly.

The first artifice philosophy teaches a child is, probably, to lie. If parents make it worth while for a child to speak the truth, then his philosophy tells him to avoid lying. If this theory holds good, how much parents have to answer for in the miserable, degenerate lives we see around us !

Jubal Rimmon had early learnt the philosophy of lying to his father, as the only means of getting any peace. That stern parent had never looked on his son with pleasure, from the hour in which he first lay, a befrilled and rosy creature, in his tiny bassinette, up to the time of his being fourteen years of age, at which period our story commences.

Jubal came into the world with many disadvantages. His father was the son of a "butty" collier, who had wished to see his boy a "gentle

man." In this object he had so far succeeded that Joshua Rimmon had become manager of a branch bank in his native town of Jumley, in South Staffordshire. It is by no means uncommon for butty colliers to accumulate money, and place their sons even in the professions. In this class, removed but by one generation from the sturdy underground toilers, all extremes and incongruities of character may be met with. Everyday life in the Black Country is full of events which cultivated society may imagine to be unreal or impossible, but which are the necessary results of hereditary influences and natural surroundings. In this atmosphere of half-education and half-elevation, Jubal Rimmon was born and bred, and it is not surprising that he should be a mixture of warring instincts and tendencies.

Jubal's philosophy was first strongly called into action when he comprehended that his father had given him a name at which everybody laughed. He felt himself deeply wronged, but soon, convinced that the thing was inevitable, resolved grimly to submit to it. But when we resolve to submit to an inconvenience or an annoyance, is the strife ended? No. Each new day brings a fresh representation of the evil, until often the concealed grievance becomes the efficient cause of a moral earthquake.

Jubal, being fourteen years old, was at home from school for the Christmas holidays. He had hidden himself, as was his habit, behind one of the heavy window curtains, and was looking out into the dismal street, lit at long intervals by a sickly lamp. It was already dark, but in this household the gas was never lit till tea-time, and tea would not be ready for an hour or more. So Jubal's occupations were limited to gazing into the darkness, and to the consideration of his grievances. His thoughts first dwelt on the fact that at school he alone out of a hundred boys had no nickname, because his own was bad enough. He had written his fortnightly letter home signed "J. Rimmon," until his father had threateningly demanded that the name should be written in full. Since then, Jubal had contented himself with cramping his signature as much as possible.

The number and enormity of the lies conveyed in these fortnightly letters passed through Jubal's mind. These were chiefly sent in answer to inquiries about his prayers and daily readings of the Bible, questions he knew by experience were not to be evaded.

"I wish there was no Bible," Jubal thought; "it does make people disagreeable." In this Jubal only committed a common error; he took

a particular person to represent a class. The person he had in his mind at that moment drove past the window, and at sight of him Jubal left his temporary haven for the seclusion of the dark and musty drawing-room. As he closed the door, he heard his father's gig pass round the house and into the stable yard, and himself called in a loud tone of voice. Not daring to disobey, he walked into the yard and presented himself without remark before his father, sullen and lowering.

"Rub the horse down," said that personage in a severe tone to his son, "and give him a drink of meal and water."

"The groom has nothing to do, father," said the boy doggedly.

"Do as I tell you," was the reply, and the beneficent parent strode into the house, muttering something about breaking that boy's spirit. He softened somewhat as, in passing the kitchen, an agreeable odour of pikelets met his nose. Having divested himself of his top-coat and muffler, he walked into the dining-room, where the gas was now lighted and the maid laying the tea.

His wife was holding his slippers to the fire; but it was not Mr. Rimmon's way to acknowledge any attention bestowed on him, least of all by his wife. Was it not her duty to perform such offices? And why should people be praised for doing their duty?

He seated himself close to the fire, pulled off his boots, and took the warm slippers without comment. His first remark to his wife was, "Send Sarah down to the butcher to say the joint for to-morrow needn't come till the next day, for I shan't be at home for dinner to-morrow."

Sarah, who was placing the plates round the table, unadvisedly ventured to suggest that there was nothing in the house for dinner to-morrow, and that they weren't all going out. Black Country servants are habitually rather free in their remarks to their employers, belonging as they do for the most part practically to the same class.

Mr. Rimmon took no notice of her remark, and Sarah left the room. In the hall she encountered Jubal, who asked her what sort of a temper his father was in.

"Beastly," replied the girl.

"Then I don't think I'll have any tea."

"That would spite no one but yourself," said Sarah; and Jubal, accepting this view of the case, entered the dining-room, opening the door just wide enough to admit of his body passing through, and shuffling round the table with that awkward gait common to boys of his age in the presence of those they fear.

Joshua Rimmon watched his son's manner of circumambulating the table, with a hard expression in his eyes, and remarked to his wife—

"It's a singular fact, Ann, that Mr. and Mrs. Harwyn don't put any style into their pupils. They may teach mathematics, but they don't make their pupils gentlemen." In saying this Mr. Rimmon drew himself up, and straightened his large black silk choker. There was something eminently comical in this remark from a man who never even came in contact with gentlemen.

Mrs. Rimmon made no reply, partly because she didn't know what to say, and partly because she knew that her husband never intended any remark of his to be answered by her; so she silently poured out some tea for Jubal, and passed him his cup. She would gladly have passed him some pikelet too, but that Mr. Rimmon strictly prohibited any such indulgence. In front of Jubal stood the well-known plate of thick bread, with a little butter on it, to which he began to apply himself with dismal energy. The meal of herbs may be preferable to a feast, when had in peace; but this can scarcely be said of the meal of herbs when the eater sits on thorns.

One of the discomforts of Jubal's meal-times at home consisted in his father's persevering asking of Bible questions. On this occasion Jubal had just taken his first mouthful of bread and butter, when the process of mastication was stopped by his father's suddenly requiring him to "tell the origin of the rainbow."

Jubal immediately began a scientific definition of the rainbow, as learnt at school. This kind of reply exasperated his father, who, understanding nothing of science, was conscious that he lost much of his dignity in discussing it. He therefore informed his son that he wished for a description of the Flood.

"Well," said Jubal, "I imagine it was something like that described in the 'Mill on the Floss,' a local flood, where a man called Noah saved all the animals on his own farm by means——"

Jubal was allowed to proceed no further. "How dare you tamper with the Bible, Jubal?" broke out his father angrily; "And, pray, what is the Mill on the Floss?"

"A book by George Eliot," replied Jubal.

"Then George Eliot must be a very bad man, to make game of the Flood. Far better never open the Bible than write about it in that profane spirit."

"But, father," interrupted Jubal, a smile dawning on his face,

"George Eliot's flood isn't the Bible flood, and George Eliot's a woman."

"For the future, sir," said Mr. Rimmon, with all the dignity he could command, "you'll read none of the works of that woman, who writes trash, and who has the indecency to call herself by a man's name."

Mr. Rimmon was very much out of temper. His son had twice caught him tripping. He took out his watch, and, noting the time, said he must go to his Bible-class, and left the room; upon which Jubal breathed freely.

As soon as his father's footsteps had died away, he looked at his mother, and said, "I thought I was in for a horsewhipping, but perhaps it's only keeping:" and he gave a great sigh.

Mrs. Rimmon silently moved towards him, and placed a trembling hand on his shoulder. Jubal's lips quivered, and the tears welled up into his eyes. "Oh, mother," he said bitterly, "I do wish the holidays were over."

"I know it's not happy for you, Jubal," replied his mother tremulously. "If I could do anything to make it better, I'm sure I would."

"It's not your fault, mother," said the boy, who was not to be enticed out of his dark mood. "Father's hard with you as well as me. He isn't so hard on Keziah. I'm sure he takes a pleasure in tormenting me. Besides, father's ignorant. He may understand his bank, and his building, but he doesn't know anything else. Fancy his saying I wasn't taught to be a gentleman at school. If father looked as much a gentleman as Mr. Harwyn"—here he broke into a laugh. Mrs. Rimmon cast frightened glances towards the door. Jubal, understanding her meaning, continued in a lower tone, "How can I learn to be a gentleman when I'm kept so short of clothes that I'm a laughing-stock at school, and when he treats me like dirt under his feet before the servants, till they don't respect me at all? He doesn't let Kizzy go shabby, nor put her down before the servants; and they all like her," said the boy ruefully; "and that is why."

"No, I don't think that is the reason," said the mother gently; and her face brightened at the thought of her daughter. "It is because Kizzy has such a way with her."

"She talks to father straight enough sometimes."

"Yes, she does; and I often wish she wouldn't aggravate him so. But then look at her sweet way with him after. She cries her eyes out if she's been ill-natured to him or anybody else."

"I do believe Kizzy loves father," said Jubal meditatively. "How she can is a bit beyond me."

"There's no one like Kizzy," said the mother. "I believe she loves everybody. I don't believe your father 'll ever be right till he's got her back in the house."

"What did he let her take a situation for?"

"She always gets her own way," replied the mother. "That's why, I suppose. After all, I'm not sure but what it's better for her : she's with uncommon nice people ; and Kizzy's too good for Jumley."

"She's the prettiest girl in all Staffordshire," said Jubal.

"Yes," said the mother. "I never saw anyone so pretty, and that's what partly takes with people."

"Kizzy and everybody are happier than me," remarked Jubal, reverting to his own case. "Harry Saltring, my chum at school, is having no end of a fine time at home now ; and I daresay Kizzy is having a jolly time at Leamington."

A postman's knock interrupted their conversation. Two letters were brought in by Sarah, who remarked that they were both for Jubal.

He looked at the envelopes, and exclaimed, "One from Kizzy and one from little Saltring." He opened his schoolfellow's first. It ran as follows :—

"LANGTON, Dec. —.

"MY DEAR JACK,—You see I haven't forgotten my promise to call you Jack, instead of that outlandish name of yours. Papa says he will write to-day to your dad, to ask you to spend the rest of your holidays with us. As your sister is away, ma says it must be dull for you. You must be sure to come. Never mind about togs. You can wear some of my big brother's. We are going to have a party on Thursday, we juveniles ; and we are going to jump for oranges. Papa has bought a boxful. Laura and I opened one end to see how many there looked in it, and we've eaten some, and they are big ones. Mamma has had the attic cleared, and we are to do what we like in it. Edmond says he shall have his lathe up there, which is a shame, for it makes such a noise, we shan't be able to hear ourselves speak. I propose we play at coalpits. Laura and I are carrying up lots of coal. Mamma gave us the key of the room, and promised not to go in. Bring your skates with you, for the ice will bear ; and mind you come on Wednesday.—Your loving friend,
"HARRY"

Jubal read this letter to his mother, and watched her face as she heard it.

"I wish you hadn't vexed your father so, over tea," said the mother.

Jubal disconsolately gazed at his clothes, and observed, "Harry Saltring dresses no end well."

"Jubal," began his mother, "try your best to please your father to-night, and I'll ask him to-morrow." And she looked as if she had promised to beard a lion in his den. "But open Kizzy's letter and see what she says."

He abstractedly obeyed. As he unfolded the letter, something dropped out. He mechanically picked it up, and glanced at it. "Mother," he exclaimed, rising to his feet, "what do you think? A post-office order for a whole sovereign!"

Mrs. Rimmon could not read, but she must needs look at the piece of paper that was worth so much as a whole sovereign to her boy.

"I do mean to say Kizzy's a brick," cried Jubal. "She says it's a Christmas box, and I'm to spend it all in the things I like best, and not tell anybody."

"It would buy you some new clothes, Jubal," said the mother. The boy's face clouded again.

"It's the first pocket-money I've ever had," he said, "and it isn't going in clothes. No," he added proudly; "they won't laugh at my clothes when I carry a sovereign in my pocket. Why, Harry Saltring only has a sovereign when he comes back. I shan't change it till everybody has seen it."

Jubal was in such spirits that it was comparatively easy for him to assume a conciliatory manner with his father when he came home.

CHAPTER II.

A CONTRAST.

MR. RIMMON'S first words on being asked to permit his son to go to the Saltrings', were these: "I shall not allow him to go. The family is utterly without religion. I've heard they go to theatres, and have dancing in their house. They are Church-goers too, and would win Jubal away from Methodism. They never have family prayers, and I question if they ask a blessing before their meals."

Mrs. Rimmon stood in distressed submission, and made no rep'y.

A moment passed, when her husband suddenly changed his tone and said—

“All I have been telling you is quite true, Ann; but I think I shall let Jubal go, if he promise me to pray against temptation. It may do him good to see the contrast between sinners and ourselves.”

Mr. Rimmon meant *himself*.

His wife was not satisfied with this explanation, and the permission thus given puzzled her extremely. It need not have done so, had she possessed more penetration. The change was due to a rapid calculation on Mr. Rimmon's part, which resulted in his believing that to keep Jubal at home during the holidays would certainly cost more than his railway fare to Langton and back. He resolved, however, that no new clothes should be purchased for the visit. He often boasted that the pair of trousers he had on, had been in wear for seven years; why should his son have new clothes oftener than once in two years, even if he did grow?

No question of clothes, however, could trouble Jubal, when he heard that his father had given permission for him to go to the Saltrings'. But his mother's mind was not a little vexed that her son should go on a visit with such a poor outfit; and she lay awake all night considering the question. The outcome of her vigil was that on the following day a new suit for Jubal arrived. Mr. Rimmon was secretly elated, for he knew the clothes could not possibly have been bought out of the housekeeping money, that proving often insufficient to supply their scanty necessities. Mr. Rimmon consistently acted on a theory that it was best to give less than was required, for if more were given, it would certainly be spent. He thought Keziah must have sent the clothes, but he did not deign to ask.

Jubal never knew that his mother sold the only bit of jewellery she possessed, to obtain this suit for him.

When the morning came for Jubal to go to Langton, Mrs. Rimmon was almost cheerful, so proud was she to see her son looking handsome and well-dressed. Jubal really was a fine-looking fellow, with his bright hazel eyes, his curly brown hair, and clear ruddy complexion.

A moment before he left the house, with his small bag in his hand, he went into the kitchen to say good-bye to Sarah. The poor soul had tears in her eyes, and with a great air of secrecy, drew Jubal behind the kitchen door, and forced something into his hand. He put it into his pocket, and did not examine it till he was in the train. It was a paper

packet enclosing half-a-crown, a gift richer than any Joshua Rimmon could give.

A cunning light came into Jubal's eyes as he made this discovery, and thought, "What a good thing I didn't show my sovereign to Sarah! She would never have given me this half-crown."

Langton station was but a small shed, but had an air of superiority for all that. In summer it was gay with flowers, and even at this season it was gay with evergreens. When Jubal stood upon the platform, he noted with heightened colour the number of carriages in waiting, and wondered if he should ride to Mr. Saltring's in one of them. He was not disappointed, for his friend Harry took him at once to a waggonette, where two ladies were seated. Jubal blushed very much as he was introduced to them. They were Mrs. Saltring and Miss Laura Saltring, the latter a girl of thirteen. Jubal did not look once at her; and when they arrived at the house, his only idea of her was a vague impression of dark red, and of black fur, and light curls falling under a beaver hat.

The house stood close upon the main road through Langton, with palisading in front of it, in which respect it resembled Mr. Rimmon's house. But here the resemblance ended, for Mr. Saltring's windows were gracefully draped, and pretty birdcages hung in them, and, winter though it was, they were filled with choice plants.

Jubal noticed a group of rosy faces pressed against an upstairs window, and heard sounds of merriment. Who had ever heard sounds of merriment proceeding from Mr. Rimmon's house?

The front door opened before the carriage had well stopped, and, when the party entered, Jubal stood shyly on the mat until Harry Saltring pushed him into the dining-room, where an early dinner was laid. Jubal was about to seat himself on the chair nearest the door, when Laura took him lightly by the hand, and led him towards the fire, saying saucily, "What did you want to sit down there for?" and she looked laughingly into his face. He coloured more than ever as his eyes met hers. He could not have explained why, but he mentally contrasted her with his sister, and to Laura's disadvantage. The face looking into his was very lovely, but there was something lacking in it which made his sister's face charming beyond all others.

"You mustn't be shy," said Laura, seeing that he made no reply. "We had a boy here last holidays who was shy, till the last week. Then he wished he hadn't been, for he had lost no end of fun by it."

Jubal tried to think of something to say, but nothing came.

"Your name's Jack, isn't it?" went on Laura, taking her hat off, and shaking the feather in front of the fire.

"No, it isn't," responded Jubal, looking down on the carpet; "only you must call me Jack, for my own name is a very ugly one, and please don't ask what it is."

Mr. Saltring, who had come into the room unobserved, and overheard the remark, called out in a loud tone of voice habitual to him, "What's in a name?" and then smacked Jubal familiarly on the back, and told him to make himself at home.

Jubal muttered an almost inaudible "Thank you," and gathered courage to look round the room; and his eyes dwelt upon one luxury after another. At last they rested on a picture of a young man with his arm about a girl's neck, and gazed at it for a long time.

Laura in the meantime induced her father in a whisper to promise her something which her mother had refused her that morning; and she went upstairs with a kind of triumphal march. Mr. Saltring began to decant a bottle of wine.

"Do you drink wine, my boy?" said he, heartily, to his young guest.

Jubal started, removed his eyes from the picture to Mr. Saltring, and stammered out, "No, sir."

"All the better for that," was the reply. "Keep to it, though I ought not to say it, for I am a wine-merchant; and if everybody took that advice, where would be our dinners, and Laura's new feathers?" This latter item was probably suggested to his mind by Laura's whispered request. "Have you ever seen a prettier girl than our Laura?" went on Mr. Saltring, looking teasingly at the shy boy.

Jubal said something about not having looked much at Laura yet; at which Mr. Saltring burst into a roar of laughter, and, taking out his big yellow silk handkerchief, wiped his eyes, after which operation he laughed once more. When he had got his breath, he shook Jubal by the shoulders, and called him a sly dog, and warned him that he would look at her more than once before he left, he'd lay a wager. Jubal laughed too, he hardly knew why: but there was such a thawing influence in that house.

It delighted Mr. Saltring to see Jubal laugh; and he proposed to show him over the premises before dinner, to make him feel at home. He first took him into the kitchen.

"Now, I'll just put you up to a trick or two. I'm just going to try the potatoes to see if they're done."

Jubal could scarcely believe his ears. He could not have imagined his father "trying" potatoes.

One of the smiling maidservants produced a plate and a silver fork and then removed the cover of one of the saucepans. Mr. Saltring took out a smoking hot potato, and proceeded to smother it in butter, and eat it, all the time beaming with good humour. "This is the way I try potatoes," he said, when he had finished; "and you can, when you choose. You won't find our servants snap your head off for encroaching on their preserves. I hire them with special regard to this. But now I'll show you where the pantry is. The pantry is a schoolboy's paradise."

Once inside this sanctum, Mr. Saltring closed the door; he then began to indicate the objects on the shelves. "These are pies made of bottled fruit. If you want to know what's inside at any time, I'll show you the way; but I daresay you've learnt at school. Boys are dreadful rogues." And he took a knife, and dexterously placing it between the pie-crust and the dish, raised the former and looked underneath. "Plum," he said. "Should you like some? but no, it will spoil your dinner. They generally keep the custards behind those tall jars. That's tipsy cake up there. Don't have any of that, nor that other thing they call trifle. No trifle of sherry and brandy in them, I assure you." So he went through everything, recommending some dishes and dissuading from others.

While they were thus engaged, Harry's voice was heard calling lustily, and the door was forced open. The boy thumped his father's broad back vigorously for stealing his friend the moment he entered the house. Mr. Saltring left the boys to their own devices, and they went at once to the rabbit-hutch, quite a considerable erection, divided into compartments.

"We've done a roaring trade with the rabbits," said Harry, stroking the nose of a handsome buck, who was protruding that feature through the bars. "None of the young ones have died, except one lot, that that old white one ate up; and we've sold them all for fourpence each at the month. Father brings all the Thorley's food for them, and the bran we get for nothing."

"I wish my father would let me keep rabbits," said Jubal.

"I'll give you one if you like to take it home with you," rejoined Harry, "and a packet or two of Thorley." And they went on to admire

a raven and an owl, both highly-prized possessions. "We shall have fine larks catching mice for the owl," Harry told Jubal. "Old Rogers,—he's the groom, you know—taught me how to get hold of them with my hands. But there's the dinner bell, and I'm so hungry."

CHAPTER III.

DR. TOWERS.

IN almost every heart or consciousness there is, figuratively speaking, the warm fire, and the bright light, and the well-spread table prepared for an imaginary guest. Some, who are most fortunate, find that guest comes at last, and receives all the wealth that has been hoarded up for him during the years when he came not. Others, less fortunate, have always the empty chair beside them, the more empty that it has never been filled. And at last they cease to watch at the window for one who will never come.

This class of persons is generally described as eccentric; and their only consolation is that that imaginary somebody, had he not lost his way towards them in the maze of the world, would have understood and appreciated them. So communing with themselves, the habit of reserve grows upon them with years, and imparts to them a grimness of aspect. Had the warming influence of some beloved being, who should understand and make allowances, come into the life, how different it would have been. How the whole nature would have grown and blossomed. For such what is there but God and a coming Eternity, where the long-expected and much longed-for may yet meet them, and all the vast enigma of life be unravelled?

Some such theory as this is needed to explain why in a small house in Langton a medical man and his two sisters lived almost entirely in seclusion. Dr. Towers and his sister Amy were old settlers in the neighbourhood. It was not until they had been there ten years that they were joined by another sister, a married lady, of whose existence the inhabitants had never heard; and nobody had ever summoned up courage to ask one of them a question. This was the more remarkable, considering that Dr. Towers had a large practice, and conversed very pleasantly with his patients on general topics. His sister Amy, too, was most kindly and sweet in her manners, returning her neighbours' calls with praiseworthy regularity; yet she never on any occasion mentioned where they had lived before they came to Langton, or the name and position of any relative they might have. The Saltrings were very friendly with them,

and Mr. Saltring often remarked in reference to Miss Towers that it puzzled him greatly that she should be so long and so completely silent. The Langtonians further marvelled that Dr. Towers, with such a large and well-paying practice, should live in such a cottage of a place. He did not appear like a miser ; yet what could he do with his money ? He kept a horse, it is true, but it was only used for the saddle. When asked by Mr. Saltring why he did not keep a carriage and drive Miss Towers about, he smiled a proud self-contained smile, and said it did not suit his convenience. Mr. Saltring had once dropped in upon him when he was dining, in such a tiny room that his large body seemed to fill it. He was dining off cold bacon. Without any apology he asked Mr. Saltring to join him, which he did, though he was anything but partial to the dish. But, as he told his wife afterwards, he would have eaten cinders had Dr. Towers asked him.

After this incident of the dinner, Mr. Saltring and his wife puzzled their brains as to whether Dr. Towers could really be in want of money, and if so, how they could induce such a proud man to accept some. But no plan suggested itself, except that they should all sham being ill, which ruse, though pretty in theory, was scarcely practicable with so clever a doctor. Mr. Saltring did venture to urge upon Dr. Towers that he should take out those little windows and put in some more civilized-looking ones, and that he might have his garden done up a little. Towers good-naturedly replied, "When you come to live at my cottage, you can have the windows put in and the garden done."

The weather was extremely cold, freezing, as Harry had said in his letter to Jubal ; and Dr. Towers and his sisters, Amy and Louisa, the latter supposed to be the widow of a French husband, Pelbois by name, were sitting in the tiny room already alluded to over an early breakfast. It was not yet daylight, and a single candle burned upon the breakfast-table. A good fire blazed in the small grate, and the table was very near to it owing to the small size of the room. Towers stretched his feet towards the blaze. His lips were firmly pressed together ; his dark heavy eyebrows were slightly raised ; and his keen grey eyes had that fixed look in them which comes of much thinking to no purpose.

At last he opened his lips and remarked, "As far as I can see, Amy, there is no help for it. I must have him here as my assistant. I don't believe he'll ever get qualified."

"Impossible, Robert," said Madame Pelbois. "Questions would be asked. He would not be received."

"It is easier to ask questions than to get them answered," replied Towers, with an unbending look in his face. "And as for his not being received, I'll guarantee that any man I bring shall be received."

"But," broke in Amy faintly, "he ought to try and qualify ; for if you were dead, he could not take your practice, and what could stand between him and starvation then ?"

Towers laughed—a short, hard laugh. "Am I likely to die?" he said. "Haven't I endured enough to kill twenty men ; and here I am, with no visible signs of decay upon me yet. At any rate," he added, as if pushing away some distant difficulty, for the purpose of tackling one close at hand, "Tom is thirty years of age, and is no further on than he was ten years ago ; and how am I to keep on paying his expenses, with the heavy drain I have always upon my ready money ?"

"That's reasonable enough," said Madame Pelbois, drinking the last drop of her weak coffee. "Still, it will seem to take away our privacy altogether, the only luxury now left us. I did think, after all our turmoil, that this little haven would be left to us while we lived."

"Women are slow to learn," rejoined Towers. "I have long since learned that to wish or to hope is to be denied. Once resolve that nothing shall make you take a certain course ; the next day you are driven into it. You two frail women may have the Atlantic rolling between you and my arm of protection yet."

Louisa held up her thin hands imploringly, and cried, "For Heaven's sake, Robert, don't talk about that."

"Louisa," said the doctor, "lock those words within your heart. Do not even think them, or the cruel Providence that has followed us all our lives will hear you, and you will go to Nebraska, and alone."

Madame Pelbois' face was ashen pale, but she made no reply.

The following week all Langton was alive with the news that Dr. Towers had a new assistant, a tall dark Spanish-looking man, said to be the doctor's nephew ; but he was as reticent as the rest of his family.

CHAPTER IV.

THE VICAR'S PARTY.

THE Vicar of Langton was about to give a Christmas party to his parishioners, the nature of which may be gathered from the following colloquy, which took place one morning at the Saltrings' breakfast-table. Breakfast

was nearly over, when Mr. Saltring said, "Mr. Rockingham wants all of us to go there to-morrow, Mary."

Mrs. Saltring's pleasant face clouded, and she said, "What a nuisance! I detest his parties. Besides, one is always sure to meet the 'butcher and baker and candlestick-maker.' Mr. Rockingham has no discrimination. He never takes the trouble even to consider whether the people he invites are accustomed to meet each other."

"I suppose," said Mr. Saltring, "he invites all the parish together, to have one bother of it. He does it to please the people not to please himself; and if he fails, that's his misfortune, not his fault."

But Mrs. Saltring had more to say. "It's too bad. Somebody ought to speak to him about it. Last time we went there, Mrs. Simmons, the greengrocer, was there, and she laughed in my face as we passed her in the hall, as much as to say, 'The parson makes no difference between us, though you do think yourself so much above me.' I thought I should have walked right out of the place. Mr. Rockingham holds there are only two classes of society, I think; the aristocracy, to which he belongs, and the 'lower orders,' as he calls them."

"Well, Mary," Mr. Saltring replied, "if Mr. Rockingham is blind, he may not be to blame; and certainly he tries to be agreeable all round. Besides, what does it matter if we do meet the butcher and the baker and the candlestick-maker? We have had some for our ancestors very likely, for we don't know much about them."

"That may be true," his wife rejoined; "but surely we may try and get a better position for our children. We are not furthering that project when we lower ourselves."

Mr. Saltring rose, as if to put an end to the conversation; and, going round to his wife's end of the table, pinched her pretty ear in a friendly way, at the same time remarking, "We had better go to the party, Mary. We mustn't bring up the small fry to despise people."

His wife looked into her cup, quietly thinking. She was a pretty little blonde woman, who had had a better offer than Mr. Saltring's. She never referred to it, but yet always felt herself on a pedestal ever since. It is a pity all the women who have had good offers cannot be labelled to that effect; then we should cease to puzzle our brains for a reason for the consequential looks they choose to adopt, especially in the presence of other women.

On the following evening, troops of oddly-dressed people were making their way towards Langton vicarage, which stood opposite the church, at

the end of the straggling village. Children fairly swarmed in at the vicarage gates, trampled upon the flower-beds, and trod down the turf, to the great annoyance of the gardener, who was shrieking himself hoarse in his master's service.

At the top of the church steps, a shaggy little old man was perched, like some sage raven, chuckling to himself, and throwing derisive language after the people. This was the sexton and bellringer, who was generally known by a nickname, which, though he had borne it fully twenty years, had lost none of its sting. This name was "Jody Waddy," believed to be a corruption of his true name, Joseph Wadeham.

"Hollo, Jody," cried one facetious youth, spying him out on his perch, "aren't you going to the party, eh?"

"I ain't going to the—— party," replied Jody, waxing wroth. "I'd liefer go to th' kitching an' get a pint o' 'ot ale. You fools 'll get nothin' but weak tea."

Another youth, hearing this, called out, "You go to tea, Jody! Not you. You're going to have some radishes to tea, off your wife's grave, aren't you, Jody?"

"By the Lord, if you dunner shut that trap o' yourn," replied the sexton, infuriated, "I'll bury you a foot deep i' water, when you die, I will, and pray God that be soon."

Mr. Saltring with his party, arriving at this moment, heard this outburst, and spoke to the old man in what he meant to be a kindly way. "Don't swear on the church steps, Jody," he said.

"I conner help it," replied Jody. "Them little debbles are enough to mak' th' parson swear i' th' middle o' his sermon."

"Well, it was a shame to accuse you of growing things on your wife's grave."

"Tworn't that as riled me," rejoined Jody. "But them young debbles know as nothin' wull grow on old Betty. She worn't no good when she wor alive, an' she ain't no good now she's dead. Why, 'er's been dead goin' for seventeen years, an' every year I've tried summat different, an' nothin' 'll grow on old Betty, no, not so much as a bit o' rue to mak' me a sup o' rue tea."

"But surely," broke in Mrs. Saltring, aghast, "you don't grow things to eat on your wife's grave."

"No, I don't," replied Jody. "Havener I just told yer, nothin' wull grow on 'er? And," he added ruefully, "it's the only bit o' garding I've

got, too. It's my opinion"—here he lowered his voice to a very sagacious tone—"that 'er just does it to spite me."

Jubal, who was standing close behind Mrs. Saltring, was much astonished at this conversation. He was more surprised when he saw Mr. Saltring give the old man a shilling, telling him to buy some tobacco, and to leave off swearing.

"You're a real gentleman," said the sexton, trying the coin with his teeth, "an' I'll bury you in the driest grave in the yard when you die."

Jubal was not at all sorry when they left the sexton and went into the vicarage. The door stood open, and the guests were entering, each with a sort of "company" expression. The vicar himself, tall, erect, and grizzled, was in the hall to receive them, and to remind them to rub their shoes.

"He looks more like a soldier than a parson," remarked Jubal in a whisper to Harry.

"He was in the army once," was the reply; "and his brother, Sir Mortimer, is in the army now."

A cross-looking servant here pushed Jubal, and told him to go into the "drawing-room," and not be stopping up the "hentry."

"Where is it?" said Jubal to Laura, who was on the other side of him. "That servant seems to think I know the way."

"We ought to have kept close to mamma," replied Miss Laura. "She must be in the library taking off her things; that's where we always go." And she took hold of Jubal's sleeve, and led him along with her.

Wait here," she said, as they got to the library door, "with Harry." She soon came out again, with her mother, amid a crowd of others.

"What are we to do?" asked Jubal of Laura, on the way to the drawing-room.

"Oh," replied Laura, with a saucy toss of her head, "you must pretend to be pleased with everything, and smile when Mr. Rockingham looks at you, and pretend to think it rare fun to walk about the room in queer dresses Mr. Rockingham will give out, and make grimaces at your next neighbour, which Mr. Rockingham calls 'charades.'"

By this time they had squeezed inside the drawing-room, which was so crowded that Jubal said it was as bad as being in the Jumley market-hall. "We shall all have to go and drink tea in the dining-room presently," said Laura; "and the housekeeper, who presides, will try to look insultingly at everybody."

"How long are we to stand here?" said Jubal.

"Until there is a general move in another direction," said Mr. Saltring, laughing. "The gong will go for tea, and then all the people will back on to us, being nearest the door ; so look out."

When the gong sounded, the Saltrings passed out of the room as quickly as possible, and stood aside to let the crowd go by. The dining-room was soon filled, and some farmers' sons were left in the doorway, standing first on one leg and then on the other, winking at one another, and wondering where they should be packed. The Saltrings, perceiving this, did not move forward, but remained in the hall.

When some of the earliest guests had finished their tea, they came out of the dining-room in a very heated condition ; and the Saltrings took the places they had vacated. They found the vicar in the middle of a story.

"The Red Sea is dreadfully hot. You can imagine nothing so hot, unless it be your own bake-ovens. The second night we were on it, my cousin, Lord Harran, said to me, 'We might as well be in a bake-oven, Rockingham.'"

"What a grand thing to say !" was the comment of a ploughboy.

The vicar put up his eye-glass, and casting a hasty glance round, said, "As I see we have all finished tea, we will sing grace, and then go to other amusements."

The Saltrings had not commenced tea, and their discomfiture set the housekeeper in a good humour for the remainder of the evening.

The vicar again spoke. "Those among you who have not seen my swimming bath might like to look at it ;" and he led the way thither. He made a point of always showing his swimming bath to his parishioners, for the purpose, as he told a friend, of teaching them that cleanliness was next to godliness.

"I plunge into the tank every morning before breakfast, winter and summer alike ; and often I have to break the ice. It always reminds me of being in the Polar regions. A cold bath is the finest thing in the world. And now, my friends, for those of you who may not care to act charades, there are several tables of 'squails' in the morning-room."

"Those round tables, Saltring, we use for breakfast," said the vicar, pointing them out. "My cousin, Lord Harran, has some thirty tables like that in his breakfast-room." Here Mr. Rockingham left off, to seize a youth who was trying to fight his way into the squail room. "My good boy," he said, "pray desist ; can't you see that the room is already full. Come to the dining-room and act charades."

"It is difficult to imagine that boy acting anything, unless it were Fat Joe in 'Pickwick,'" remarked a young lady of some four-and-twenty years old to a young man about three years her junior, who appeared to be her brother from the strong resemblance between them.

As soon as this young lady spoke, Jubal pulled Harry by the sleeve and pointed her out. "Oh, mother," said Harry, when he had looked at her, "do you know who those are? They are Mr. Harwyn's brother and sister. She comes to stay at the school sometimes; and that's her brother Gerald, such a good cricketer. You should see him bowl. He's at the Birmingham Hospital, learning to be a doctor. I wonder how they came to be here."

Gerald Harwyn had spied out the boys, and was making towards them of his own accord. "Why, surely this is Rimmon, and little Saltring," he said, taking each by the hand. "I didn't know you lived in this neighbourhood."

"Jack doesn't live here," said Harry; "he's on a visit to us. This is mother, and father, and Laura."

"I've often heard my son speak of you," said Mr. Saltring; "I'm very glad to make your acquaintance."

"This is my sister Maud," said Gerald, introducing her. "We are visiting at Mr. Layton's, the lawyer, you know."

They went in company to see the charades. "Do they call this charades?" said Jubal. "They should see those we act at school." And truly the assemblage of shrieking and laughing figures in quaint masks and strange dresses might have reminded the travelled spectator more of a carnival than anything else.

CHAPTER V.

KEZIAH.

THE dismal house at Jumley had been going on in its own dismal way, while Jubal was enjoying the hitherto untasted pleasures of cheerful home life at Langton. On the day of the vicarage party, Mrs. Rimmon was sitting at one of the dining-room windows, laboriously mending stockings; and as the light faded, she looked out on the agreeable prospect of a high brick wall, thickly set with broken glass; it surrounded Mr. Rimmon's fruit-garden, which could only be entered by a single door

fixed in the wall. To this door there were two keys, one of which Mr. Rimmon always carried, the other remaining in the possession of the gardener, except at night, when the master took charge of both.

The garden wall was a great eyesore, for the rising generation of Jumley copiously practised writing upon it with chalk and tarred sticks. This afternoon saw upon the wall unmistakable allusions to Mr. Rimmon, by the side of a tolerably good portrait of that personage by some budding artist. The portrait was so good that Mrs. Rimmon recognized it, in spite of the unnecessarily elongated nose, and determined to tell the groom to clean it off, as soon as it should be dark enough. But nothing could remove another portrait of her husband that adorned the wall, executed years ago with a tarred stick.

Mr. Rimmon had never in any way alluded to these caricatures; but his wife knew that he had seen the tarred drawing, for he had gone to the window on the first morning of its appearance, to look if the postman were coming, and had turned very red. From that time he had never looked out of the window at all.

Mrs. Rimmon was very sad this evening, and the tears fell drop by drop from her dimmed eyes on to her worn fingers. Jubal had not written to her since he had gone away, not even a line to tell of his safe arrival. Mr. Saltring had announced this in a note to Mr. Rimmon. "Ah," she thought to herself mournfully, "he will never want to come home again. What is there to attract him? He sees me haggard and careworn, shabbily dressed, and afraid of his father. He will get to care nothing for me."

While Mrs. Rimmon was thus meditating, a tall lithe figure burst in upon her, without any warning, bringing in a stream of cold air.

"Oh, Kizzy, my darling, how you frightened me!" exclaimed Mrs. Rimmon.

The young girl flung her arms about her mother, and kissed her again and again. "Why, you've been crying again, mother!" she said. "Dry your tears, now. Has he been scolding you, the old dragon? Where is he? I've a charming piece of news for him, and I'm only considering whether to indulge him with it before or after prayers to-night."

"Please don't vex your father, Kizzy; oh, please, don't let us have any row," pleaded the trembling mother.

The girl gave a wild laugh. "You leave me to do my own business, mother. I get on better with father than either you or Jubal, who caved in to him so." And the merry girl struck a match on the sole of her little shoe,

and proceeded to light the gas. She then perceived a paper lying on the table, which she took up and examined; and her mother looked admiringly at her, as all the world did. Such an exquisite oval face, such ripe lips, such rich colouring; and then the eyes—they were irresistible, as many a youth in Jumley knew. These brown orbs, so mobile in expression, so seductively tender one moment, so terrible the next, were perhaps Keziah's greatest charm. For the most part, the piquant face had a mocking look upon it, as if life were one gigantic joke; yet it would change in a moment to an expression of angelic tenderness at the sight of others' woes. Her hair, short, black, and glossy, curled in a wayward fashion of its own all over the shapely head, and gave the girl a sort of defiant look. Mrs. Rimmon, though no artist, saw that her daughter was a beautiful creature; and though no student of human kind, she felt the force of Keziah's character. All through her childhood, to will had been to accomplish. Mrs. Rimmon looked upon her daughter as a being she could not understand, but could only wonder at.

Kizzy looked up from the paper, her eyes full of merriment now; and there was a touch of irony in her voice as she said, "Here's another subscription list, headed by 'J. Rimmon, Esq., ten pounds ten.'" She hurriedly dipped a pen in the ink, and wrote opposite to the announcement, in a bold, fearless hand, "robbed from his wife and children," and with a little dancing step, she carried it to the chimney-piece, where she placed it conspicuously.

She next flung her hat on to her father's chair. The rest of her outer garments followed. Her mother was meekly going to remove them.

"No, mother," she said with a mischievous look. "Let lazybones do it himself. Didn't I surprise you, now?" she ran on. "You didn't know I was coming home, did you? I said I wouldn't, when I was cross, you know." And the great eyes became melting, as she added, "But I couldn't help it, you see, after all," and she fell to kissing her mother again.

Mrs. Rimmon, when she was released, took up her heap of stockings and sat down again. Kizzy watched her, seemed to take a sudden resolve, darted forward, possessed herself of the stockings, and flung them on the fire.

"Oh, Kizzy," cried the mother; "what have you done! Oh, how could you do that?"

"Is it the fortieth or the fiftieth time you've refooted them, mother?" asked the girl, with the old mocking look in her face. "It's the last, at

all events." But perceiving that her mother was beginning to cry, she suddenly knelt at her feet, took hold of both of her hands, and gazed at her caressingly.

"Don't cry, mother; I've brought home some new stockings. I didn't mean to bring any for father; but I couldn't help it at the last." Then she darted up; she was always swift in her movements. "I've brought something for tea," she said, opening her black bag. "Guess what it is. It's a delicious haddock; and I'm not going to give father any. I can't help plaguing him a little," she said deprecatingly, for her mother was beginning to object. "Oh, there's a good time coming—I mean to-night, before or after prayers, not during prayers; it's always a bad enough time then."

"Oh, dear Kizzy, if you are to quarrel with your father, please don't bring in Scripture, now don't."

Keziah rang the bell. "Now, Sarah, you dear old thing, cook the haddock, will you?" she said, when Sarah appeared.

"Won't you wait till your father comes?" asked the anxious mother.

"No; why should he always be considered before everybody else? I've just come from Leamington, and I want my tea." And she sat down to the piano and played a few gay snatches. Her exuberance of spirits was always so great, it was bound to have an outlet of some kind; and when there was no other way, Kizzy was a sad torment.

"Mother," she said, breaking off her music, "what did you call me Keziah for? Somebody says I ought to have been called Irene." Then she suddenly burst into song, taking up the refrain in the middle—

"For the touch of a hand and a whispered word
Have rendered me blest for aye;"

and the wild, clear young voice rang out so joyously that the dismal house seemed to have been changed as if by magic. Could the wilful girl have meant to tell her mother any story in this song? If so, it was lost upon Mrs. Rimmon: she was noting that the tea was brought in. She told Keziah that tea was ready, and the light-hearted girl continued singing after she left the piano—

"Love is the lord of the May."

And, as she sat down, nothing could have looked more in harmony with the words than her own self.

"I am so glad that Jubal is gone to Langton," she observed, as her mother poured out the tea. "It is so dull for him here. He's not

like me. I can be contented anywhere. Oh," she broke off, "*he's* coming I can hear him."

"Oh, Kizzy, don't vex him—please, don't."

The dining-room door opened, and Joshua entered.

"Well, Kizzy," he began, in an apologetic and conciliatory tone, going round to his daughter, and not feeling quite sure of his reception.

She presented her round blooming cheek to be kissed, as if doing a sort of penance; and Mr. Rimmon moved round to his end of the table as awkwardly as Jubal had done on an occasion already described.

"I'm glad there's haddock for tea, Kizzy," remarked the father, in an insinuating tone; "I like haddock."

"This haddock is mine," replied she, nodding her head with saucy defiance.

"Oh, indeed," said Mr. Rimmon, hardening visibly; "and whose money bought it, I wonder?"

"Not yours," retorted Keziah, quite decided by her father's look to continue tormenting him.

"There's more than you can eat," continued Mr. Rimmon meditatively.

"Then I will save it for mother's breakfast."

"You are very selfish."

"You are not," said Keziah, with her mocking smile.

Mr. Rimmon took a piece of buttered toast, and bit out a section.

"You've forgotten to ask a blessing," put in Keziah. "Those people who lack the reality cannot dispense with the forms. I should advise you to ask a blessing."

"I asked one inwardly," replied Mr. Rimmon solemnly.

"Gently, gently," said his daughter, her forefinger raised impressively, and her tone implying doubt.

"You're a very undutiful child," said Mr. Rimmon, quite understanding her; "and it is written, 'Cursed be——'"

"I won't listen to that," broke in Keziah, putting her fingers into her ears; "and I've got such a piece of news for you. Will you have it before or after prayers, or shall we toss up for it? First, please to get up from the table, and take that paper from the chimney-piece," she went on, her face brimming over with merriment.

Dignity said, No; but curiosity, which was uppermost, caused Mr. Rimmon to do what his daughter had desired.

"What does this mean, Keziah?" he asked, in sepulchral tones.

"Just what it says, father," answered the girl. "And don't you think it's a little too bad, now," she added, her face grown quite serious, "to make poor mother go without so many things, when you give ten guineas to a subscription for Heaven knows what?"

"Kizzy," said Mr. Rimmon, trying to be stern, but considerably abashed, "I've yet to learn that children have a right to dictate to their parents; and while you are under my roof, will you oblige me by discontinuing to use 'Heaven,' and such expressions, in an irreverent spirit?"

Keziah's great eyes flashed angrily now; but she answered in a soft, gentle voice, with an appallingly true ring in it, "I don't believe I am irreverent, father; but if you will leave off your irreverent use of holy things, I will gladly follow your example." Mrs. Rimmon had commenced to cry. "I must tell you," said Keziah, "that I consider you to be a hypocrite"—she dwelt markedly upon the words. "You cannot feel all the Bible teaches, and treat mother as you do;" and the frank eyes looked unflinchingly into her father's, and his eyes dropped before them.

"It matters little for myself," went on Keziah, in a lighter manner, "how angry you may get with me; it is mother I care about, and," she added, as if by a sudden inspiration, the bright eyes becoming soft and tender once more, "I shall have a new home soon, I'm going to be married."

"Going to be what!" almost shrieked the father and mother simultaneously. "Why, you are not seventeen," exclaimed Mr. Rimmon.

"That's true," said Keziah, "but I'm seven-and-twenty in experience, thanks to your training."

Mr. Rimmon had abstractedly upset his tea, and was now made aware of the fact by its dripping slowly on to his check trousers. The tea was very hot, and the trousers fitted tightly, so Joshua got the full benefit of it. He pretended to ignore the fact, however, and hid the anguish he was enduring under the icy tones in which he replied to his daughter—

"And perhaps you will tell me who the man is you are carrying on all this nonsense with?"

"I will," said the girl; "his name is Rupert Edmonton."

After Keziah's last announcement, Mr. Rimmon walked silently from the room with a very dejected countenance. He was thinking of Rupert Edmonton, not as a man, for he knew him only by name as a successful

doctor in Leamington, but as an obstacle to other plans he had formed for his daughter—or rather plans which another had formed, whom he felt compelled to obey. The news of the projected marriage thoroughly upset him. His daughter, noting the troubled expression, and attributing it to anything but the real cause, of which she, poor child, knew nothing, ran swiftly after him into the passage, where he was taking down his great-coat. Her heart smote her. What right had she to judge her father?

"Father, dear," she said, laying the softest little hand upon his sleeve, "forgive me, I——" and here she burst into a flood of tears.

Mr. Rimmon felt himself quite in a corner. It was the sharpest reproof Keziah could have administered, this contrition, this affection; and at the moment, too, when his whole mind was engrossed in thwarting her plans. With evident effort he said, patting her in a paternal fashion upon the shoulder—

"There, there, don't cry, Kizzy, we'll say no more about it. It was very unfair of you to call me a hypocrite." And by this time Mr. Rimmon had recovered his dignity a little.

"I know, I know," sobbed Keziah; "I have done very wrong."

Mr. Rimmon could not help showing his triumph in his face. Perhaps his daughter would turn out more easy to deal with than he had imagined in this affair.

"Father," said Keziah, looking up earnestly, "it would have been better if I had come and begged you to act differently to mother."

"My dear Keziah," observed Mr. Rimmon, with great dignity, "it is not in your province to interfere in any way with me. There, dry your eyes and go to your mother, and be a better girl in future." He left her, and she stood there until the hall door banged, and she knew he had gone.

How many times had the poor girl, after an outburst of impetuous anger, gone to that father, full of contrition and tenderness, and found no response; there had been something in his manner that froze her, and left a very desolate feeling. "No," she said to herself sadly, "father can't be a good man; yet he is my father," and there was a great grief at her heart as she went back into the dining-room and sat down, with her little hands crossed disconsolately in her lap, and a most pathetic look upon her face.

CHAPTER VI.

RUPERT EDMONTON.

KEZIAH RIMMON had been a day-boarder at a middle-class boarding-school in Jumley, and being what was called "finished," and yet uneducated, she had been harassed not a little by the thought that she must take a situation of some kind and was not fit to be a teacher. All through her school life she had looked forward to this moment when she should be free to go forth into the world and find a life more congenial to her. Unlike the majority of girls who leave their homes on such a quest, Keziah had, figuratively speaking, fallen upon her feet. She had answered an advertisement for a young companion of a lively disposition to the only daughter of a widow living at Leamington, and she had got the situation.

She only announced her intention of leaving home when everything was agreed upon; and Mr. Rimmon had had a momentary battle in his mind betwixt dislike at losing the only bright thing in his house, and mercenary motives. Avarice conquered.

The six months which she had passed in this situation had been the happiest in Keziah's life. The mother of the young lady whom it was her duty to amuse was the widow of a wealthy tradesman, very good-hearted and very extravagant, lavishing upon her daughter Lucy everything she could desire; and all Lucy had, Kizzy shared, besides receiving an ample yearly sum which Mrs. Beredith termed an acknowledgment and salary.

It was at the Berediths' that Kizzy first met Rupert Edmonton, a rising surgeon, who managed somehow to find leisure to look in on them frequently, though sometimes it was only to shake hands and go away. People began to think Miss Lucy was the attraction.

The first visit that Rupert Edmonton had paid to the Berediths after Keziah's advent advanced matters no further than that he and Keziah scrutinized each other. Each found the other worthy of study. He thought, while he was talking to Mrs. Beredith, and his eyes wandered towards and dwelt upon Keziah, seated by Lucy, engaged upon some fancy work, "how pale the moon grows when the sun shines." Lucy, with her light-brown, smooth hair simply knotted behind, with her innocent blue eyes, had a sort of prettiness; but this other girl—she was enough to set anyone's blood on fire. How could one human being have such a dower of glorious beauty? A resolved bachelor he, yet his heart beat faster at the

sight of Kizzy. He had heard men describe this terrible sensation ; he had never in his life experienced it before. There was something that made him feel as he left the house that night that he was no longer free. He knew he should be attracted back by the magnetism of those melting eyes.

Kizzy had looked at him too. She saw a tall and somewhat slender man, with pale, straight features, and a look in the grey eyes of strong will and settled melancholy. She could scarcely have told why, but she longed to ask Lucy if he came often, or when he would come again ; yet she could not bring herself to ask this.

That night, when alone in her room, she looked at herself critically for the first time. It is only as the harbinger of love that real coquetry comes. Hitherto she had had but a contempt for that beauty which meant nothing to her, which had brought upon her more annoyance than anything else. Now she looked upon it in a totally different light : she was vaguely glad that she was beautiful.

The following evening Mrs. Beredith herself broached the subject of the young surgeon, as the three ladies sat working together in their pleasant drawing-room. "He is such a clever doctor," she said, "and he's really very nice when you know him. He's had trouble, I'm sure. This is the only house he visits in a friendly way. He hasn't a relation in the world."

Kizzy's fingers involuntarily stopped in her work, and her face assumed a far-away look. The object of this conversation entered while it was going on, shook hands with Mrs. Beredith and Lucy, and then with Keziah. Oh, that little hand, how soft and white it was. He, a staid man of thirty, felt thrown off his balance for a moment at that sweet contact. He did not stay long, and did not exchange a word with Keziah ; but from this time he dropped in almost every day. Without seeming to notice her, he soon knew every curve of the figure, could have told the precise fashion of the red ribbon at her throat, and had burnt into his memory all the hundred expressions which that mobile face passed through in a single hour.

After a few weeks, Edmonton seemed to take some firm resolve, and it was many days before the Berediths saw him again. How terribly long are some days in youth ! It was in these days that Kizzy learnt that hope deferred makes the heart sick. Every ring at the bell during the evening quickened her pulse, and left her paralyzed. This grave, serious man, who had scarcely spoken to her, irresistibly attracted her opposite nature.

At the end of a fortnight Mrs. Beredith, never guessing at the cause became so troubled at Keziah's pale looks as to talk seriously of sending for Edmonton.

"Oh, please don't," exclaimed Keziah, a rich colouring mounting to her cheeks, "I am sure I'm quite well." And she seemed to mentally shake herself as does a Newfoundland dog fresh from the water, and became gay—unnaturally gay. She thought to herself, "What am I here for?"

The young doctor had been steeling himself these few days, and prided himself that he had conquered the passing passion that this wonderful face had aroused in him; and he paid another visit to the Berediths in a very heroic frame of mind. He ought never to marry, he knew that. Then why play the coward? And in the pride of strength his visits became frequent again. He told his conscience that the interest that the paleness on this lovely girl's cheek had aroused in him was of a strictly professional character, and that the returned bloom was due to a bottle of mixture he had insisted on her taking.

As time passed on, Kizzy's shyness wore off, and she began to exhibit the merry side of her character freely. On one occasion Edmonton was the only one who did not smile at a joke she made; and she, turning the full glory of her radiant face upon him, said, saucily, "Shall I explain the joke to you, Dr. Edmonton?"

He replied, "Don't take the trouble to do that, Miss Rimmon. I don't take much interest in jokes, and I never indulge in them myself."

"I will tell you why," rejoined Kizzy, who was in one of her wild, daring moods; "it is one of two things. You are very vain, and you think you don't look well when you smile; or you are incapable of seeing the joke, and are sharp enough to be aware of the fact. So you put on the cloak of pretended scorn."

Mrs. Beredith and Lucy were aghast. They knew that Kizzy could run on wildly enough at times, but this had always been when they had been alone, hitherto.

But Rupert Edmonton did smile, and did not look at all bad when he smiled.

"There," said Kizzy, beaming. "Look at yourself in the glass, and perhaps you will laugh often."

The little volley from the seductive lips had broken down a barrier Rupert had believed invulnerable. He looked almost despairingly at Keziah, as much as to say "What have you done?" and he took his leave almost at once.

He went away as a man who had now no choice to make. Those bright glances, the music of that voice, had bound him in the meshes of a stronger net than that of the fate which would have kept him from her.

His face was even graver when he came back the next night, at a later hour than usual. Mrs. Beredith and Lucy were deep in some house-keeping discussion which involved many figures. It was quite natural that Rupert should talk to Kizzy, who was not so preoccupied. They somehow or other found themselves at the piano, turning over the music together. All in a moment, Lucy and her mother quitted the room. Edmonton, with his heart beating wildly, gently imprisoned the little hand that hung by Keziah's side in his ; and as Keziah, with cheeks that grew pale, dropped her eyelids, he said, in a tone she had never heard him speak in before, tenderly raising her face with his disengaged hand—

"No, do not be afraid to look at me."

The lovely eyes glanced into his for an instant, and dropped again.

The glance fired his whole nature. He raised the hand and laid it upon his heart. "Kizzy, my darling, does that tell you anything?" he said.

She drew her hand away, gently but firmly. "I don't know what to say to you," she replied, averting her face.

Mrs. Beredith and Lucy entering, made further conversation upon this impossible ; and Edmonton had to take his leave without any more communication with Kizzy, except that he held her hand a moment longer that was necessary in saying good-bye.

It was some days after this, before Kizzy gave him another opportunity of speaking to her. Yet in these days she had been wholly absorbed in one thought, the glad future that seemed opening out before her. The next occasion on which this pair met alone, was one of fortune's sending, rather than the result of any planning. Kizzy had gone on a message for Mrs. Beredith, to make inquiries about a sick friend. Lucy had some letters to write, and did not accompany her. On the steps of the very house, whom should she encounter but Edmonton himself. The large hat she wore partially shaded her face.

"I am glad of this chance meeting, Miss Rimmon," said the doctor deferentially, extending his hand. "You have given me no opportunity of speaking to you for days and days. I hope you are not angry with me."

"No, I am not angry," she replied, looking down.

"Then do me a great kindness," he said with much animation for one

of his quiet temperament. "Walk with me a little, I will lead the horse. I want to explain myself a little to you."

She hesitated. "I was going to ask how Miss Finch is," she said, in a faint voice.

"You can do that as you come back," he suggested. "She has but a trifling indisposition. You do not ask how I am, though perhaps I'm a real sufferer. Kizzy, don't trifle with me. I've had too much sorrow already in my life. Come, let me explain myself to you a little, and then, let me know my fate."

There was such a look of pain in his face that she mechanically walked away by his side, while he told her how, till he saw her, he had determined never to marry. She must not ask him the reason. It was for her sake if he did not tell her. But he could never have made such a resolve if he had ever seen her. Would she make him happy in spite of that hidden sorrow of his, or leave him with the winter in his heart, all the more bitter that the sun had shone out for a brief moment? "Kizzy you are a terrible judge," he said, taking her by both hands, and letting his horse wander on. "No criminal ever awaited sentence with more trembling than I await one little word from you."

How it came about, Kizzy could never have told. But the strong arm was around her, and his lips touched hers.

CHAPTER VII.

JOSHUA RIMMON IN SEVERAL LIGHTS.

THE news of Keziah's projected marriage caused more dismay to Mr. Rimmon than can be easily imagined, without knowing the state of his affairs; and he was by no means sure that he should be able to dissuade his daughter, either by parental authority or an appeal to her affections. This girl had a conscience. It was a question whether anything he could say would make it appear right to her mind that she should throw over her lover. He had heard somewhere that there was some mystery connected with Dr. Edmonton. Mystery is generally discreditable, thought Joshua. Could he possess himself of any information that would tell powerfully against the young man? One thing was clear; there must be immediate action on his part. He must go and view the ground, without any matured plan it might be, but at once. So the very next morning, he

went earlier than usual to the bank, came home to an early lunch, ordered his dog-trap, drove to the railway station, and took a ticket for Leamington.

It was a short journey, and the winter sun was still high when Mr. Rimmon presented himself at Rupert Edmonton's lodgings. He was not at home. "I will wait till he comes," said Mr. Rimmon; "please show me to his sitting-room."

The servant led the way up a very dark staircase. On the top stair Mr. Rimmon stood till the girl had opened a door on the landing. Once in the sitting-room, Mr. Rimmon waited till the girl's footsteps had died away, and then quietly locked the door. The walls were covered with works of art, but these attracted none of Mr. Rimmon's attention. His eyes were riveted upon a large, handsome desk which stood on a small table. Mr. Rimmon, with an iron setting of the muscles of his face, advanced towards this, and took a small bunch of skeleton keys from his pocket, with one of which he speedily unlocked it.

The first things that met his gaze were the young man's diplomas. These he examined, and found to his astonishment that they ran, not in the name of Rupert Edmonton, but of James Elworthy. It never occurred to him to doubt that these two were the same person; and with a look of having discovered something at least, he replaced the diplomas, and made some notes in his pocket-book.

His search was next rewarded by an envelope containing something written and addressed to his daughter. He hesitated not a moment to read it. His eyes dilated as he read how, when the young doctor was a medical student, a number of them lodged in the same house, somewhere in Germany. Quarrels had arisen between himself and one of his fellow-students, as he was naturally hot-tempered. One man, a German, Otto Müller by name, had particularly provoked him, and they had once nearly come to blows, and this in public. There was another young student there at the same time who disliked Otto very thoroughly, but was much beloved by Edmonton. Otto and this young man, whose name was not mentioned in the document, loved the same woman. Finally, one night Otto was discovered murdered in his own room, and Edmonton was the first to find the body. He had been intending to leave Germany the next day, having received his diplomas. He was going the round of his friends to say good-bye, and something caused him to call on Otto first; he would not leave at enmity with anybody: he found him murdered.

He could not avoid suspecting his friend of being the murderer. "I am alone in the world," he said to himself. "I can disappear, and the blame will not be laid at *his* door." He managed to get away very successfully. His disappearance had the effect he had expected. He was sought for as a murderer ; but he had never been found, nor was it likely he ever would be.

"Indeed !" said Mr. Rimmon, as he read this.

This recital finished with a passionate appeal to Keziah. The last lines were merely abuse of himself for being so weak as to engage the affections of a pure girl, when he had this sword hanging over his head. She should not marry him in ignorance of it.

All this, and the passionate expressions of love, Mr. Rimmon passed over with disdain ; but his hands were trembling violently as he took down the name of the German town mentioned. A great fear seized him now, lest a footstep should come on the stairs before he had closed the desk. He put the paper back into its envelope, and left the desk pretty much as he had found it : then unlocked the door and walked down-stairs.

He was intoxicated with his good fortune. He almost felt righteous, in that he was to save his daughter from such a fate : for his heart told him that, were this document posted to Keziah, she would marry the doctor all the more for it. He would arrange matters. He would leave a message, and no name, and make good his escape.

But as he was walking downstairs he lost his footing, and completed the journey to the bottom on his back, just as the doctor entered the house. Not knowing Mr. Rimmon in the least, he sprang to his aid, and raised him into a sitting posture. After inquiries of a surgical nature, which satisfied Edmonton that there was no serious injury, Mr. Rimmon was persuaded to go into the surgery and take something. "You've had a nasty shake," said the doctor ; "you must have this glass of wine." Mr. Rimmon replied that he was a teetotaler.

"I'll put it in a medicine bottle if you like," said Edmonton.

"Do you know who I am, sir?" remarked Mr. Rimmon, somewhat recovered.

"Not in the least."

"My name is Joshua Rimmon ; and, being in Leamington, I looked in to thank you for your kindness to my daughter, and to ask you to come to see us."

Edmonton was thunderstruck. It was the last thing he would have expected of Mr. Rimmon, from what he had gathered from Keziah,

though she had smoothed all accounts of her father as far as possible. He lost no time in making his future father-in-law comfortable ; for it was clear that fortune was upon love's side. It was a good omen. Kizzy would not let that knowledge he was about to communicate to her, separate them. Tea was ordered in, and Mr. Rimmon, like another betrayer, ate bread with the man he was about to betray.

"You may not have heard a very good account of me from my daughter," said Mr. Rimmon grandly. "Kizzy and I never hit it off quite. She is a high-spirited girl. But I have a father's heart in this bosom," he said, theatrically placing his hand over the breast-pocket containing the pocket-book in which he had made notes in reference to his host.

"Kizzy has never spoken of you but as a dutiful daughter might speak," said Edmonton.

"I can afford to settle something upon Kizzy, you know," said the delighted father.

Edmonton insisted emphatically that he would take nothing with the girl he married ; he had quite enough for them both, and a family too, if God should send one. And he thought inwardly, "How wrong it is to judge hastily of people. I have always had the idea that this man ill-treated his daughter." It was infinitely preferable to be able to respect his father-in-law ; and he gave Mr. Rimmon quite a hearty shake of the hand when he went away.

He could not help noticing that Mr. Rimmon's hand was icy cold. The arrival of a patient prevented his thinking over these strange events till later.

Mr. Rimmon went straight to the telegraph office and sent off the following message :—

"Joshua Rimmon, Leamington, to Chief of Police, —

"James Elworthy, whom you seek for Otto Müller's affair, is at—— Street, here, passing as Rupert Edmonton. Keep my name out of it."

Having despatched his telegram, Mr. Rimmon made his way to the railway station, and bestowed himself quickly in a carriage, for a train was in waiting. He did not notice that another person was in the compartment, until the train had started, when a voice accosted him with—

"Well, Rimmon, you don't know me then ?" this in a highly sarcastic tone.

"You here, Hackbit ?"

"Well, yes, I took the liberty of following you to Leamington to-day. You had forgotten to tell me you were going."

"And what did you follow me for?" said Mr. Rimmon petulantly. "You ought to know I should tell you."

"Drop that confounded acting with me," replied Mr. Hackbit. "If I've helped you to get many a pound, do you think it's for love of you? You are much mistaken if you do. 'Tis that I mean it to come some day into my hands, along with your beautiful daughter."

"You seem to forget altogether that I have a son."

"Your son may get disinherited," rejoined the other with a cunning grin. "I want to know when it's to be settled between your daughter and me. You've been to see that Edmonton to-day. I've had my eye on him too. Kizzy won't marry him."

"I've settled that business. Of course, you must marry Keziah. Now about the other affairs. You got that bill of sale signed all right, did you?"

"Yes," said Hackbit, shortly.

"You are quite certain they don't know what it was?"

"Do you take me for a fool?"

"Not exactly; but you know we managed one affair very badly, and nearly got let through. I should be more comfortable if you left off drinking. It would be ruination if my name appeared mixed up with these things."

"I'll take care of your good character as long as it's useful to me," said Hackbit.

"What sum of money was it you lent them?"

"Thirty pounds."

"The usual terms?"

"Well, not exactly," replied Hackbit. "These are women, and more gullible. They are to pay back ten pounds a month for six months—five pounds for principal and five for interest. I put in an execution at the Simpsons', and a confounded bother they've been."

"Well, well, I don't want any particulars; that's in our agreement. I pay you to do my business for me, on the understanding that you spare me all details."

"Hang it all, I haven't given you any details, have I?" rejoined Hackbit pettishly. "I can tell you one thing, I'm getting deucedly tired of lodgings. You had better hurry on that affair with Keziah."

"We mustn't hurry her," replied Mr. Rimmon timorously. "You see, she's in love with that Edmonton. She would never hear of it if we were to press her now."

"It ought to go for something that I am her cousin," said Hackbit ; "her own father's sister's child, and a flourishing solicitor."

"She's got rather a contempt for her family, I think. She favoured me with a long paragraph from one of George Dawson's lectures one day, all about natural ties being no ties, merit being the only standard for affection."

"Why did you let her go to those lectures?" said Hackbit.

"Do you think I can prevent her going where she likes?" answered the father.

"You ought to. Men like George Dawson and Thomas Cooper inspire rebellion."

"If you want to marry Kizzy," said Mr. Rimmon, "I would advise you to keep your views about Dawson and Cooper to yourself."

"Leave me to manage my own affairs," was Hackbit's rejoinder.

"You never leave me to manage mine," retorted Rimmon.

"Because you are such a fool in some things. What have you sent that boy of yours to the Saltrings' for? They'll teach him to find you out."

"Nonsense," replied Mr. Rimmon ; "what can they get to know to my discredit?"

"Oh, nothing," said Hackbit with a sneer ; "but send the knife to the grinder's to be sharpened, and somebody will take it up to cut with. Jubal won't come back quite so blind as he went away. I know something of the Saltrings, and they are a lot too sharp."

"That will make no difference," said Mr. Rimmon gruffly ; "Kizzy has found me out, and Kizzy has never been to the Saltrings'."

"Your daughter is intellectually as much above her brother and her father as she surpasses them in personal attractions," said Hackbit, stating the fact mildly, as if it bore no reference to his companion.

"Kizzy is very sharp," replied Mr. Rimmon, knowing it would not pay to show his vexation at the last speech. "You may find Kizzy too sharp for you yet. She's an angel on one side, but she's a Tartar when she thinks people are doing wrong." Mr. Rimmon glanced at his companion's face as he said this, to mark the effect of his words.

"I know women better than you do," said Hackbit crossly.

"One class of women, no doubt," replied Mr. Rimmon. "But in one respect, at least, I think I know women better than you do. They are altogether more powerful creatures than men give them credit for."

"Bosh!" shouted Hackbit, with sudden energy. "One specimen of that sort would be enough for me : and, look here, Rimmon, no more

beating about the bush ; I will have this marriage arranged. My silence is for sale ; and the price is—your beautiful daughter."

Mr. Rimmon made no reply to this.

When they arrived at Jumley station, Rimmon asked Hackbit to come up and take some refreshment at his house.

"Oh, no, thank you," replied Hackbit, scornfully ; "you never have anything fit to eat in your house. Your wife cannot be one of the strong-minded women you have been describing, or she would get at your purse-strings."

With a surly good-night, Rimmon left him and went home on foot.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEW YEAR'S EVE AT THE SALTRINGS'.

IT was New Year's Eve, and the house of Saltring was ablaze with lights and gay dresses. It was a custom with the Saltrings to dance the old year out in the company of as many friends as they could get together. The large drawing-room was cleared for dancing, and decked with evergreens and holly. The Towers were there, and Maud Harwyn and her brother. It was on this evening that Jubal was to walk his first quadrille, after many hours of tedious rehearsing in the family.

Mr. Saltring was in his glory. Nothing pleased him better than to fill his house with guests, and treat them magnificently. The tea-room was full of people, and Mr. Saltring took Lawyer Layton by the arm and led him into the drawing-room. "Is anything the matter?" he said.

"Oh, no," replied Layton.

"What's the good of deceiving me?" said Saltring. "Were we not chums at school? I am quite sure something is troubling you. Open your heart, and the cloud may pass away. Besides," added he, "I am not afraid of hearing a man's troubles, for fear I shall be obliged to help him."

"You're a good fellow," answered Layton. "You always were. The trouble on my mind is not a business one at all. It has reference to Miss Harwyn."

"Miss Harwyn!" exclaimed Mr. Saltring, much puzzled. "What can trouble you about her?"

"Well, the fact is, she's a very fine girl, and I fear she may be on the

verge of wrecking her life. Since she has been staying with us, my wife has discovered, by pure accident, that she and young Towers had met before, and Maud appears to be attached to him."

"But you don't know anything against him, do you?" said Mr. Saltring, gravely.

"I do not; but you know as well as I do, that there is some extraordinary cloud over that family; and my experience as a lawyer tells me that these mysteries are generally guilty ones."

"My dear Layton," answered Mr. Saltring, deprecatingly, "that's not generous of you, not at all generous."

"Lawyers cannot afford to be generous," replied Layton, "in their judgments. They must not be blinded by generosity, or sympathy, or anything of that kind. They must be neutral. A lawyer must have no emotions. He must only study and seek to stir the emotions of others."

"I am no match for you in argument, I know," said Saltring. "But perhaps this attachment has not gone far; you may be able to use your influence."

"The worst of it is," replied Layton, "that in affairs of the heart there are no axioms to guide one. It is as if a supernatural power were driving a soul to one certain end, and whatever influences are brought to bear upon it from outside, combine with and help the force already at work within."

"There's one thing I believe is a help," rejoined Saltring, "and that is prayer."

The lawyer looked at him in amazement. "That sentiment from you, Saltring?"

"Why not?"

"Pardon me, I had no idea you held those views."

"Because I don't carry a cant about with me, I suppose. Let me tell you once for all, I do believe in it; and it is a mystery to me how men can go on living and enduring the sorrows that come to everyone, the great loneliness which is, after all, the condition of every human soul—I say I wonder how men do not put an end to their lives, if they have no belief in a pitying Providence and the power of prayer."

"You astound me," said Layton.

The conversation was interrupted here by the entrance of the dancers. Forms and ceremonies were not much observed in this house; but one form Mr. Saltring never omitted was to lead his wife out at the top of the first quadrille. Layton, who did not dance, watched this performance

with a good deal of fresh interest. He had seen his friend to-night in a totally new light, and an unsuspected one. He was deep in thought about it all, when a sweet odour of heliotrope wafted past him, and he glanced up to see his favourite whirled away by the doctor's new assistant.

If he were uneasy at the sight so was some one else. That some one was Dr. Towers himself. His massive figure leaned against a door-post, and his eyes had a troubled expression in them. Layton happening to glance that way, noticed this. "Ah," he thought to himself, "I know there is a reason; but that man knows the reason."

If Layton was quick to observe, so was Dr. Towers. He caught the lawyer's glance directed towards him, smiled sarcastically, and changed his position.

A new interest now took possession of the lawyer. Laura Saltring was dancing with Gerald Harwyn, and Jubal Rimmon looked on with fury in his face. Laura evidently perceived this, and was provokingly attentive to her partner. "A child like that, is it possible?" thought the lawyer. "She has all the arts of a coquettish woman. I wonder her father doesn't notice it. And what a terrible look that mere schoolboy has on his face? What will that boy develop into?"

When the quadrille was over, Mr. Saltring came back to his friend. "I am getting too stout to dance, Layton," he remarked, with his good-natured smile. "But I fancy it makes the young folks enjoy themselves better if I enter into it too; and I often tell my children there is no reason why they shouldn't always be as joyous as they are now; so I must set them the example."

"Nevertheless," said Layton, "it is not true of the majority."

"I never feel dismal, for my part," said Saltring. "I believe I am the most fortunate man living."

While they had been talking, Maud Harwyn and young Towers had passed out of the room together, and seated themselves in the cool entrance hall.

"How strange it is that I should have met you here, above all places?" said Maud. "You never told me you had an uncle in practice."

Towers did not offer any explanation.

"You don't seem glad to see me," went on Maud.

"You know that is not true," the young man answered.

"Well, I am sure you did not look pleased when you met me the

other night," rejoined Maud, rather pettishly. "I thought people showed themselves pleased to meet their friends."

"It would have been better for me had I never seen you," the young man said gloomily.

"And why, pray?" Maud asked, the colour leaving her face.

"Because"—and his face was white now—"I love you, and we can never be anything to each other."

"Do explain yourself," said Maud.

"I cannot; but I shall marry no one else. Let that stand for something."

"You are behaving very cruelly to me."

"On the contrary, I am doing you a kind action. It is myself I am cruel to. I beg of you, Maud, do me the kindness of meeting me as little as possible. I am not free to leave this place. You are. Why not go?"

"I cannot understand you," she said faintly, and with evident effort.

"I cannot make it clear to you, I can only abhor myself for the selfishness which has brought you this trouble. I did very wrong to let my love for you grow. I now pay the cost, and seek to make what reparation I can."

"Tell me, why did you not stay in London and complete your qualification?"

"I cannot explain that either. Have pity on me and leave the neighbourhood. While you are here, I have no strength to keep away from you. I knew you would be here to-night, and I came. Act for me. Every time I see you, the chain tightens its hold. I, of all men in the world, must love no woman."

"Do not end it so," pleaded Maud. "There may be some great mistake. Things may not be as they seem. I will wait."

"You must not," answered the young man, tightening his grasp of her wrist. "Marry some good man as soon as possible; do it—do it for my sake."

Maud's colour rose, and she took offence. "Men always serve women so," she said. "As if affection were like goods and chattels, to be so transferred. You could never really have cared for me. If you had, you would have suffered death rather than separation, as I would."

Her companion turned a ghastly face upon her and echoed her words, "death," "separation," in a strange, far-away tone. Maud started from her seat and brusquely left him. She made her way to the dining-room, where refreshments were laid, and poured out a glass of wine for herself.

She had scarcely taken it, when a gentleman claimed her for the next dance. It was a waltz, and she danced it as though her life depended on it. Her brother, noticing her, "What can have made Maud so angry? It must be that young Towers; I never liked his hanging about her so much."

It was past eleven o'clock, yet new guests arrived; and they brought with them some extraordinary news, which spread like wildfire through the company. Dr. Edmonton, of Leamington, had been apprehended by some foreign police on a charge of murder. Rupert was well known and much liked in Langton, and had been called in in consultation many times.

The people, however, whom the news seemed to affect most were the Towers, especially the assistant, who turned a ghastly face on Mr. Saltring, who exclaimed, "Do you know him?"

"No," replied Towers, with a kind of gulp; but the "no" sounded almost like a yes.

"What awful news to come on New Year's Eve," observed Mr. Saltring.

No more dancing could be thought of, such a gloom seemed to settle on the company.

"I don't believe he's guilty," said Mr. Saltring fervently. "He will get off, you will see."

Somebody groaned. Mr. Saltring looked round to see who it was; but nobody was to be seen behind him.

"Many a good man has been accused wrongly," he went on. "I must have the strongest proof the world can offer, before I'll believe. This is only some terrible mistake. It will all end well."

But the spirit of festivity could not be revived by any cheering words, and the party broke up; and as the front door opened to let out the first who left, the church bells rang out merrily for the New Year.

CHAPTER IX.

NEW YEAR'S EVE AT THE RIMMONS'.

NEW YEAR'S EVE was a great day with the Rimmons, inasmuch as it was the only day in all the year when Mr. Rimmon invited a few friends to partake of his hospitality, and these consisted chiefly of members of his

own family : David Rimmon, his brother, considerably younger than himself, a manufacturer of cotton cloth, residing at Manchester ; Mrs. Rimmon, Joshua's aged mother, supposed in Jumley to be eccentric ; if not out of her mind, living alone in a little cottage with a small maid-servant, and never seeing anyone except her son, whom report said she greatly repulsed ; Miss Dorcas Rimmon, Joshua's unmarried sister, a milliner and dressmaker, residing in Jumley ; and last, but by no means least, Thomas Hackbit, solicitor, who always addressed his uncle as "Rimmon," and never as "uncle" except on the rare occasions of its being necessary to emphasize the relationship.

Early on the morning of this day, Mr. Rimmon had been busily engaged with his nephew in the perusal of a bundle of letters written by Rupert Edmonton to his daughter, of which he had surreptitiously possessed himself. These had been carefully put back, and Kizzy had never missed them. The pair had heard that Rupert had been apprehended, but kept it carefully secret from Kizzy, to avoid unpleasantness on this day of festivity.

Kizzy and her mother were up before daybreak, uncovering the musty drawing-room furniture, and lighting a fire in that room early because the chimney would be damp and would surely smoke. The piano had been carried in there, and the best album was put out. All the silver had to be unpacked out of baize, and polished ; glass and china to be washed ; and the best tablecloth to be pressed. Upstairs the spare room had to be set in order, a white quilt laid on the bedstead, a cover upon the dressing-table, and a scent-bottle partly filled with scent of a vague and uncertain odour, which had done duty for several years, placed ready for use. Then the cooking was something considerable. There would be a turkey for dinner, and two vegetables. The plum-pudding had to be boiled, and mince-pies baked. It was in reality a terrible labour and a terrible trial to poor Mrs. Rimmon. It required an apprenticeship in the art of managing a small open grate to get all this cooking done at all ; and of course the meat-hastener, in which the turkey was suspended, got out of order on this particular day, and the turkey would keep stopping, till Sarah declared it was one person's work to keep "that there turkey from burning." Then there was nothing like room enough for all the saucepans on the top of the grate. In fact the one containing the plum-pudding was nearly up the chimney.

Dinner was to be ready at two o'clock, and ten minutes before that time Mrs. Rimmon, very hot and trembling, either owing to the work or

over-anxiety, went upstairs to don her black silk gown, which had lain hidden away in lavender since last New Year's Eve. It looked sadly the worse for wear about the elbows, and a good deal out of date; yet Mrs. Rimmon felt a sort of glory in having it on. "Oh, mother dear," said Kizzy, looking at her arrayed in the garment "you shall have a new black silk. I won't change my dress at all to-day," she added, with a brave determination not to look better dressed than her mother; and with a great deal of tenderness she put a touch here and there to the attire of her mother to give her a better appearance. Just as she fastened a dainty lace collar to her neck, there was a knock and a ring, and Mrs. and Miss Rimmon were announced.

Mrs. Joshua met them at the foot of the stairs, and hoped they were well.

"Mother's going downhill fast," replied Dorcas. "I don't believe she knows you."

The elder Mrs. Rimmon did indeed greet her daughter with a cold stare which betokened no recognition, and remained quite silent until asked if she would go upstairs to take her things off.

"No, I shan't set foot there," she said, in a querulous tone; and then, departing from the subject, remarked that she was a useless creature, and she should die in the workhouse yet.

Her daughter gave her a friendly shake up on hearing this, and bade her hold her tongue, which treatment did not tend to reassure the old dame. "Would you believe it, Ann," Dorcas said, "she's been talking about that workhouse all the time I dressed her, after I'd taken all the trouble to go round and see she turned out decent, too?"

Mrs. Rimmon, senior, here showed a disposition to sit down upon the stairs, for which act of impoliteness she was duly reprimanded by Dorcas, who, seizing her bonnet strings, rather dragged than took off her bonnet and shawl, after which operation she said, "We may as well set her up at the table to wait for dinner, Ann."

But Kizzy had come upon the scene, and she broke out, with flashing indignant eyes, "Well, Aunt Dorcas, if mother stands by and sees you put on grandmother, I won't. You ought to be ashamed to treat her so."

Dorcas called her niece a pert hussy, and taking her mother rather roughly by one arm, was about to lead her into the dining-room and "set her up," but Kizzy, full of youthful vigour, put her aunt aside, and taking her grandmother's withered hand, gently led her into the dining-

room, darting a look, contemptuous and menacing, at her aunt as she went.

The touch of Keziah's gentle hand acted like magic on the old woman, and the spirit awoke in the worn body and lit the sunken eyes for a moment, and she said, "Thou art not a Rimmon, child."

"For the present I am, grandmother," replied Keziah, all the anger having died out of her face, a bright smile replacing it. "But I'm going to be married." She placed her in her father's easy chair by the fire, with a footstool for her feet and a cushion for her back ; and the old lady said, "I know you now—you are Kizzy, my little singing-bird. I have something to tell you."

Kizzy bent her head to hear better.

"Never get married," said the grandmother emphatically. Kizzy would have said something in reply to this, but that she saw that the light of intelligence died out of her grandmother's eyes.

In the meantime Mrs. and Miss Rimmon had gone upstairs to the spare room, and at this very moment Dorcas was surveying herself in the looking-glass with evident satisfaction, although the reflection there visible, we will answer for it, was not such as to give anybody else any satisfaction. But perhaps she looked at herself with a dressmaker's eyes, and it was her dress, rather than the form it covered, which attracted her. This latter bore some resemblance to a board. The head above the dress was crowned by a mass of copper-coloured hair, drawn so severely away from the forehead as to cause the spectator to think of scalping by a new method, and at the same time keeping her eyebrows considerably elevated—no, not her eyebrows, but the place where they should have been. Her eyes, grey and narrow, and set too close to her nose, gave her a cunning appearance, especially when she smiled ; her chin protruded too far ; and her face was thickly freckled. Yet, we assert, she was looking at herself with satisfaction ; while her sister-in-law, waiting for her, was inwardly quaking lest the turkey might be burning, or the potatoes be done too much.

In truth, she had reason to quake, though she knew it not ; for during her absence a quantity of soot had fallen down the kitchen chimney, and had covered the Brussels sprouts and the dishes set to warm upon the hearth. This Mrs. Joshua discovered on going to the kitchen when Miss Dorcas had liberated her. It was aggravating, and Mrs. Rimmon could not help shedding a tear or two ; for though she could not be called a woman of imagination, she did picture to herself very vividly the

countenance of her lord when the spoilt dinner should be placed upon the table.

If Mrs. Rimmon counted on her husband's wrath, she was not disappointed. All were at length seated round the dinner-table. The turkey was placed before Mr. Rimmon, flanked by just four sausages. The reader may ask, Why four? The reason was, Jumley sausages were sold eight to the pound, and Mr. Rimmon had calculated that half-a-pound could be cut into eight portions, and suffice for all his party. On Mr. Rimmon's right sat his brother David, so different from him in appearance that no one would have taken them for brothers. Mrs. Rimmon sat next to David. Keziah sat at the opposite end to her father, with a solitary dish of vegetables in front of her. Mr. Hackbit and Miss Dorcas occupied the other side of the table. Keziah had insisted on laying a little table before her grandmother, close to the fire.

"We will say grace," said Joshua, rising. Everybody rose and stood, with closed eyes, except Hackbit and the old lady. The former certainly rose, and amused himself with looking at all the others until the blessing concluded, when he sat down with a cynical smile upon his features.

"Please cut grandmamma's first, and I'll mince it," said Keziah. Mr. Rimmon complied, and passed a plate with a slice of the breast upon it.

"Let me do it for you," said Hackbit. Kizzy looked at him searchingly before replying. He appeared sincere enough, and she allowed him to do it. He waited on the old lady throughout the dinner with assiduous attention.

At last Mr. Rimmon helped himself, and passed his plate to Keziah for vegetables. There were no Brussels sprouts, he quickly discovered. He darted at his wife a look of majestic wrath, which made her lips tremble. Everybody saw the look, and began to eat in silence. Kizzy was silent too, though boiling inwardly with indignation. She had always a quick temper, but on this occasion she tried hard to conceal it, until she noticed that her father had placed his potatoes aside. Mr. Rimmon could not have Brussels sprouts; he would not have potatoes. At sight of this, Kizzy burst forth, flashing a look like a tigress at her father. Thomas Hackbit looked admiringly at her. He liked to see a fine creature in a passion, especially when it was followed by a melting mood, as it always was in Kizzy's case. Kizzy looked round the table and said, "Brussels sprouts would have been on the table to-day, but yonder miser, though he possesses houses with the newest improvements in cooking-ranges, has in his own kitchen a small, old-fashioned, ill-working

open grate. I invite you all to look at it after dinner, and then you will see how an accident like the falling of soot into saucepans may occur, without anybody being to blame."

Mr. Rimmon turned green with rage. Miss Dorcas began to be elated in prospect of a row, in which she hoped to figure. But David, who had preserved a moody silence hitherto, put in his word, and said in a conciliatory tone, "I'm sure the dinner is very nice. Don't let us have any unpleasantness to spoil it." Miss Dorcas's face became melancholy.

The old lady near the fire dropped her table-napkin, and Hackbit immediately picked it up for her without comment. David and Keziah both watched this act—the former with mistrust and uneasiness, the latter with surprise and pleasure.

The plum-pudding turned out a great success, so good-humour was restored: and Miss Dorcas began to upbraid her brother in a joking way for being still a bachelor. David had always a manner of making a great effort when he spoke even a simple thing, as if he had to wind himself up for every new sentence. It was his habit to take all jokes seriously, so he answered—

"Fortune is so fickle, Dorcas. I make it my work to keep a nest for Joshua's bairns, if they ever need one."

The full radiance of Keziah's smile was turned upon him. She saw him now in a new light. She had hitherto thought of him as an inoffensive, silent man. Now she saw the manly and loving heart that lay hidden under his silence. Poor Kizzy was continually making an endless search for good in people, and was always getting disappointed. No wonder she was delighted to find her uncle David a man she could respect and love.

As soon as thanks were returned, all solemnly rising again, Hackbit went up to the old lady and asked her if she would go into the drawing-room with him. She did not understand him, and replied in a doleful tone—

"I always said it 'ud come to that."

Hackbit looked much puzzled.

"I've slaved all my life," she went on, "up early and late, and I shall die in the workhouse yet."

David, who heard this remark, turned a very red face to Joshua, and observed, "I've never seen the home you've provided for mother. I think I'll go and look at it this afternoon."

A flash of malice and pleasure came into Hackbit's eyes, but showed itself nowhere else on his face.

Joshua answered, "No, brother; do not break up our only day together. I've often told you mother has a strange fancy for keeping her house to herself."

The old lady heard the word "house," which awoke the old theme, and she said once more, "The house is the place for the like o' me."

"Mother," screamed Dorcas, "I'd be ashamed to be talking about the house, if I was you."

Dorcas's voice seemed to revive the old dame's faculties a bit, for her next words were very much to the point.

"He always forgets to order the coal in, and the cinders won't burn any more."

"She doesn't know what she's saying," observed Dorcas, with a wink and a nod.

David went gently towards his mother, his eyes full of tears, and said to her, "Come, mother, we'll talk a bit."

"Why, it's Davy," she said, a light breaking over her face; "but he says you won't come to see me." Then she lowered her voice and added, "And I can't eat bacon, and the Sunday meat's so tough I can't bite it."

Joshua became very angry, and said, "What's the good of listening to an old woman who's out of her mind? Every one in Jumley knows that I do all she will let me do for her."

Dorcas, determined to put an end to the conversation, was about to carry off her mother into the drawing-room, but Kizzy interposed. "No, aunt; grandmother's much better by this fire than going into that damp room."

"Stuff and nonsense," responded the aunt; "she isn't so nesh as all that."

"Let me stay with singing-bird," said the old lady querulously.

"So you shall," said Kizzy; and her aunt went off in a huff. David and Joshua went across the road for a turn round the garden, and Hackbit went off professedly to smoke, but in reality to get a drink at a neighbouring inn, his uncle's teetotalism not agreeing with him.

Kizzy's mind was full of the vexed question of her grandmother's true condition. Before to-day she had always believed her father's statement that her uncle David had left the whole charge of the grandmother's maintenance upon him. It was quite evident that her father had given the old lady the impression that David would not help her. Kizzy had

always believed, too, that her grandmother must be peculiar in her mind, as she invariably refused to see her, or, indeed, anyone except Dorcas and Joshua. But this had not repelled her, and on the New Year's Eve, which was the only occasion on which Keziah had met her grandmother, she did her best to make much of her.

"Singing-bird," said the grandmother, beckoning her with great secrecy close to her, "*he* would never let me see you."

The words stabbed the girl to the heart, not only for the grandmother's condition, but her father's. Shred by shred the garment of his virtue had been torn off before her eyes. Could it be that he had no good at all in him? To her it was terrible to have to utterly despise her own father. She turned away into the hall, where she heard her uncle David hanging up his hat.

"Uncle," she said mysteriously, "come with me and let us look at grandmother's house. It is not far away. I will fetch the key out of aunt Dorcas's bag, for there's no one in the house, as grandmother's little servant goes out for her holiday to-day."

He was about to offer some objection, but she stopped him. "You must come," she said, trying hard to check the rising tears. David looked uncomfortable, but consented. "Where is father?" asked Kizzy.

"Gone to look for Hackbit," replied her uncle.

CHAPTER X.

HOW JOSHUA RIMMON HONOURED HIS MOTHER.

THE way led down a dull street, hedged on either side by small houses, all detached as if in an independent spirit. A slight snow had fallen, but it was already quite black, as everything was in that district owing to the abundance of coal-pits and iron-foundries. As Kizzy and her uncle passed along they met companies of colliers, who were cleaned up and "playing," which term in the coal districts is applied to a chance holiday, from illness or otherwise. Some of these men nodded a peculiar side nod, met with nowhere except in the Black Country. David returned these salutations with quiet courtesy. His brother would have shaken hands with them, and yet made them feel his superiority. David was rarely familiar in his manner to any one, yet somehow he always managed to leave a pleasant impression. His whole attitude and ex-

pression seemed to show that he held himself above no man. Perhaps it was this demeanour which made him so successful a master, for he was unsurpassable in the management of his factory hands. But Kizzy knew nothing of all this ; she had scarcely seen this uncle, and knew him only by her father's report. She now began to judge for herself.

The street was a long, straggling one, and led to a more crowded district, built upon part of a large common, which was studded here and there with huge black mounds, ruined engine-houses, and worked-out coalpits, some few of which were bricked over. Many of the houses had bands of iron round them ; some rows of houses were banded together ; all leaned in one direction or another, and the walls bulged.

It was in a cottage which stood alone in this locality, itself banded with iron, and having on one side great wooden supports, that Joshua Rimmon had placed his mother. Kizzy knew the house well. She always passed it on her way to the town, which lay beyond the common land, about half a mile distant. This common land was known as the Old Park, and was undermined by a complete network of "cruttings," or underground roads, which extend frequently for miles.

"Is this the place he's put her in ? Is this what I pay twenty-five pounds a-year rent for ?"

"Do you pay the rent, uncle ?"

He made no reply ; but waited while Kizzy opened the door.

"Nobody ought to live here ; look how it's sunk," he said.

The inside of the house was as little inviting as the outside. We will not go into detail ; but one thing deserves mention. It was after they had looked at the wretchedly small and ill-furnished rooms downstairs, and had gone into the grandmother's bedroom, that David Rimmon's eyes became riveted on an old wooden box. His chest heaved, and turning to his niece he said, his honest eyes full of tears—

"Oh, Kizzy, Kizzy, that's the box poor mother went to service with when she was a girl. I remember her telling me she would never part with it. Poor, poor mother, to think of her coming to this, after her hard-working life, and when she has sons who can afford to keep her properly."

"It's not your fault, uncle," said Kizzy, whose lips were quivering. "You have left Jumley many a year, and father has deceived us all."

"He told me," went on David, after a little pause, "that mother was queer in her head, and would have her own way. I ought to have come and seen for myself."

"Father's miserly ; that's at the bottom of it all, uncle. Oh, it is dreadful."

These two scarcely spoke to each other all the way home, but they felt in a sense united to fight against all this wrong doing.

Mrs. Rimmon had just woke up from a nap as they entered, and David went up to her and took her withered hand, and said, "Mother, I was always a cowardly sort of a fellow at bottom. It was always my way as a lad to avoid a difficulty or a row. That is why I believed what Joshua told me, instead of coming to you to know if it were true. Oh, mother, can you forgive me?"

With an almost supernatural effort, she flung her withered arms around him. "I forgive thee, Dave ! I've nowt to forgive thee."

"Oh, yes, you have, mother," he said, breaking down utterly, till the tears fell thick and fast from his eyes on to her wrinkled cheek. "But, oh ! mother, I will try to make amends. I shall take you home with me, mother."

"But, Joshua !" said the mother, her face losing its momentary expression of joy. At the thought of him, her mind began to wander once more, and the old theme of the workhouse came up.

"Look here, mother," said her son. "No workhouse can be a quarter so bad as the house you are living in."

"You haven't been in it, have you?" she said in a terrified manner. "Joshua said no one was to go in. It hasn't always been so bad as it is now," she hastened to explain. "But Joshua told me he's had such heavy losses."

Her son groaned. "If he has had losses," he said bitterly, "he will be all the more pleased that I should take charge of you altogether."

"Do you take me with you," pleaded the old lady. "I wouldn't cost you much, indeed I wouldn't. I don't eat much, and I shall never want any new clothes ; and it won't be for long," and the tears were trickling down her furrowed cheeks.

"Don't, mother, I can't bear it," David sobbed. "Don't say any more. You shall leave with me this very night." And he hastened away from her to make instant preparation.

CHAPTER XI.

A NEW YEAR'S LOSS.

THE terrible news about Rupert Edmonton came to the Berediths, first through the baker's boy, and Mrs. Beredith absolutely refused to believe it; but she was not long left in doubt, for a messenger brought a letter from Rupert himself, telling of his calamity, and begging her to break it herself to Kizzy; he was too crushed to write to her himself as he should. "I have been before the magistrates, and have to go to Bow Street, London, to take my trial there. There is the account of all this in my desk for Kizzy; would to God I had sent it her earlier!"

The lines seem to have been written under great agitation. They were much blurred. Mrs. Beredith at once started to see Rupert if possible. She was granted an interview.

She could scarcely believe her eyes when she saw Rupert, he was so changed. He was haggard and hollow-eyed.

"You are very good to come to me," he said. "There is no one else who could come."

Poor Mrs. Beredith could only weep, and protest that she believed him innocent, and offer him any money at her disposal, if that could help him.

"I have money at my own command," he answered her, "but I shall conduct my own case. Lawyers sometimes lose a man who is innocent. They are better suited to get off the guilty."

The interview was necessarily short. Just before Mrs. Beredith left him, Rupert implored her to go to Jumley and see Kizzy. She promised to do this, and quitted him with great reluctance. When she got home she was seized with a hysteric attack, and Lucy became frightened; for there was no Dr. Edmonton to call in. Thus it was not until New Year's Day that Mrs. Beredith arrived at Jumley to fulfil her promise. When the door of Mr. Rimmon's house was opened to her by Sarah, and she asked for Miss Rimmon, Sarah burst into tears.

"Oh, ma'am," she cried, "she's gone right away; she had bad news last night. Nobody can find her."

Mrs. Beredith stood bewildered. "Oh, that I had come before!" she said. "Let me see Mrs. Rimmon," she said at last.

Sarah led the way to the dining-room. "The missis, she's upstairs," said Sarah, "but I will tell her. Oh, this is a wretched house, ma'am."

There's the master's sister ; she's been up here and stayed all night ; and Mr. David, he's took old Mrs. Rimmon off to Manchester, and he and the master's had words ; and, oh, what a house this is !" And she went out to call her mistress.

As she got to the staircase, she saw Miss Dorcas craning over the banisters. "Who's come, Sarah?" she demanded, hurling the words at the girl like the report of a gun.

"No one for you, miss," replied Sarah, pertly, trying to pass her.

"Tell me who it is, directly," said the spinster, blocking up the way.

The girl stood resolute, her lips pressed together.

"You shall not pass up these stairs till you've told me," said Miss Dorcas.

Sarah appeared able to bear no more. Her Black Country fierceness came to the fore, and taking Miss Dorcas by the wrist with her strong, sinewy hand, she said, "If you don't make way, I'll throw you over the banisters."

"You shall suffer for this, girl," said Miss Dorcas, making way though. "Only wait till my brother comes home."

The girl gave a laugh of derision.

A few minutes afterwards, a stooping, broken-down figure entered the dining-room. It was Mrs. Rimmon. Mrs. Beredith met her with a look of womanly sympathy.

"My pretty darling's gone," wailed Mrs. Rimmon. "She's been missing all night. She must have wandered off frenzied. Oh, my poor Kizzy ! and all the mines as there is uncovered !" and she shuddered, and pressed her hands against her head.

Mrs. Beredith said nothing. What could she say? There seemed nothing for her to do but to take her leave.

As she opened the door to do so, she surprised a figure jumping away from it, with copper-coloured hair and a red and freckled face. "How dare you listen at doors !" she exclaimed. "I will tell your mistress."

This was a second shock for Miss Dorcas. Sarah had insulted her, and a visitor had taken her for a servant, and had caught her listening.

Sarah had heard this, and wore a very satisfied look as she came to open the front door for Mrs. Beredith. That lady put half-a-crown into her hand, and said, "Can you write, my girl?"

"Yes, mum," replied Sarah, proudly.

"Then write to me and let me know all the news you can about Miss ~~Rimmon~~. You know my address, of course. I must go back, or my

daughter will be frightened. I suppose competent persons are making a search?"

"Oh, yes, mum, master's got ever so many looking for her."

Nobody had thought of communicating with Jubal except Sarah; and she strongly advised him to stay at the Saltrings' till the end of the holidays, if they would have him.

All through that day, and the next night, and for many days and nights, an unavailing search for Keziah went on.

In this search Mr. Rimmon displayed very real zeal. That she should be speedily restored to her home was most important to him; and, incongruous as it may seem, he really had some affection for his daughter, though this had not prevented his being ready to sacrifice her to his own interests. His plans appeared to be frustrated. Kizzy was sacrificed, and he was not the gainer but the loser by the transaction. He and his nephew, Thomas Hackbit, had driven her forth, and it was no comfort to Mr. Rimmon that no one would know this.

On New Year's Eve Mr. Rimmon, with his own hand, had given Keziah a forged letter purporting to have come from Rupert, and containing a confession of the murder.

The two plotters had imagined that this letter would turn her heart from her old lover completely and for ever. They had rightly calculated that without this she would have implicitly believed her lover innocent, and would have stuck to him all the more for the calamity which had befallen him.

The poor girl must have left the house almost immediately after receiving the letter, when they believed her to be gone to her room. It was not until the following morning that it was discovered she was missing.

It was a terrible thing for Mr. Rimmon to have to set the police to look for his daughter; but what could he do? She must be found, or his crime against her would go for nothing. But as the days passed, with no success, his state of mind was wretched. Hackbit kept away from drink for the most part, now suggesting plans, and now swearing at his uncle for having brought matters to such a pass.

CHAPTER XII.

THE EXPLOSION.

OVER a week had passed, and Mr. Hackbit observed this fact to Mr. Rimmon in his dining-room, seated upon the table, his hat upon his head the wrong way before, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his eyes terribly bloodshot. He next gave it as his opinion that Kizzy had fallen into one of those worked-out mines, and expressed his intention, should this turn out to be the case, of throwing his uncle's body after her. Then recollecting that he had during the week exhausted all possible epithets upon Mr. Rimmon, he began to rain abuse on the colliery proprietors of the neighbourhood. "It's disgraceful," he said, "the way they leave these pits, without so much as a fence around them, let alone bricking them over; though the place is swarming with children. It gives me the horrors to walk across the Old Park on a dark night; I always expect the next step to lead me into one of these infernal holes. And they go and undermine the whole district, and then move farther off, and let the land for building purposes, though the houses sink and fall, and they know it."

"Well, I'm not a colliery proprietor," replied his uncle.

"If you're not, you buy the land," retorted his nephew, "and build cottages on it."

"Well," said Mr. Rimmon savagely, "it's right enough on population grounds. The neighbourhood's overcrowded enough; it's better for those who are left, if a house falls and kills a few, I suppose."

"Very fine philosophy," responded his nephew with a sneer. "But nature will carry off your mother soon enough, at all events, without your putting her in one of those cursed houses." Then returning to his abuse of the colliery proprietors, he said, "They always put off repairing their machinery, too, and never buy a new rope till the old one has broken and dropped a cage full of human beings down the pit. But I suppose you'll say that's right on population grounds."

"The men are as careless as the masters," rejoined Mr. Rimmon, bristling. "They continually light their pipes at their lamps, though they know an explosion may follow."

The time when this conversation was being held was about three in the afternoon. The two had been out all the morning, and were now

waiting for Sarah to bring them some refreshment.—The clouds came over very heavy, and a thick fog came on. They were compelled to light the gas. Just then Sarah entered with a tray of refreshments, and as she stood in the doorway a sound like the crash of a hundred thunders rang through the air. Sarah let her tray fall, crying at the same time, "It's an explosion ;" and precipitately fled.

The two thus left together with the wreck of their lunch, gazed at each other with elevated eyebrows. Neither spoke for a moment, till Mr. Hackbit removed his hat slowly, scratched his head deliberately, and curtly ejaculated, "The devil !"

This opened his companion's lips, who said, "You may depend it's an explosion at Troworth mine, for Hedgely refused to have the patent lamps there. We'd better go."

"How many do you suppose were in the mine at this time," asked Hackbit.

"Three or four hundred."

"Look here," said the lawyer, "if Kizzy is anywhere in the neighbourhood, this will bring her out ; for never a man is burnt in the pits but she goes to see if she can do anything."

While they talked, an endless tramp was heard in the road outside, and loud wailing.

Troworth Hill coal-mines are situated on the opposite side of the town of Jumley to that on which Mr. Rimmon lived ; and Hackbit and his uncle followed the direction of the tramping feet across the Old Park, through the disreputable, dirty little crowded town, which had nearly always its pestilence as the summer came round, as it had always its pestilence, summer and winter, of vice and profanity. Neither Mr. Rimmon nor Mr. Hackbit could be said to notice these facts much, as they had both been brought up in the neighbourhood ; and what we are accustomed to does not shock us.

The shops in the town appeared deserted, and the blackened snow bore the marks of multitudes of feet.

Before they reached the spot, they saw lights moving, and their throats were filled with smoke and sulphury vapour. At last they got close to the wailing crowd, consisting chiefly of women whose husbands were in the mine—too often their sons also. Prayers and oaths mingled strangely in their conversation, which was disjointed, and chiefly at the screaming pitch. Clouds of hot smoke were vomited from the pit's mouth. Hackbit and Rimmon forced their way through the women to

get near a group of gentlemen who were close to the pit's mouth. They were the proprietors, together with the engineer.

"Can you account for this, Mr. Murdock?" asked Mr. Rimmon of the nearest of these gentlemen.

"It's the lamps, I expect," he replied. "We should have had the Davys in a few days."

"Had any of the men come up before this occurred?" continued Mr. Rimmon.

"Every soul is down that went down this morning."

"How long do you think it will be before any one can venture down the pit?"

"It would be death to any one who went down yet."

This conversation was extremely difficult to carry on, owing to the shrieks of the women, who called incessantly, "Can't you do anything to save 'em?" "Isn't there a man among you?"

Mr. Murdock tried to speak to them, but they hissed at him as the author of their misery, and demanded their husbands and sons and fathers at his hands, with threats and entreaties. One woman, frenzied, tried to throw herself down the pit, and was dragged back by main force.

"Ah!" shrieked a woman's voice above all the rest, "I knew there'd be this to-day; for didn't my poor master's dog come home to me at seven this morning, him as has always been for years down the pit with him."

Murdock was again asked when some one would be sent down the pit to the rescue. He replied calmly that he himself would go as soon as he could, but at present it would be sheer madness to attempt it.

Hour after hour the crowd watched, refusing to stir. Rimmon and Hackbit had been away for some time, and had returned again. About ten o'clock smoke was still issuing from the mouth of the pit, and the clamour for relatives was still going on. Murdock with his companions continued in consultation.

It was Hackbit who addressed him this time "Do you think an effort can be made now?" he asked in a voice quite sober. "I shall go down with the first cage."

A cry of "brave man" was heard in a woman's voice, clear and silvery. It sounded like a musical bell amid all that tumult. Hackbit's eyes wandered round the torchlit crowd and rested on the white face of Keziah, who was holding an infant in her arms. It was true, then; the anguish of others had drawn her forth.

Mr. Rimmon was looking for the owner of the voice, too, but had not caught sight of her, for she had hidden herself immediately. Hackbit's quick eye had followed her, however, and he dashed after her at once.

"Oh, cousin," he exclaimed, in a reproachful tone, "why have you made us all so miserable?"

The girl hung her head. "I only went to hide my own misery," she said gently. "I didn't think anybody cared."

"I care very much," responded Hackbit. "Believe me, cousin, I feel more for you than words can express. I will do anything, suffer anything to bring back happiness to you;" and the hypocrite received a grateful look from the lovely eyes, that had grown so pathetic since he last beheld them, and looked larger and darker for the dark circles that now surrounded them. How pinched her little face had grown! Even Hackbit's heart was stirred as he looked at her.

"Whose baby have you got?" he asked.

"It belongs to that poor woman down there," replied Kizzy, indicating with her finger. "She fainted, and the baby fell from her arms, and nobody offered to pick it up. It would have been trampled to death."

"Is there nobody the child can be given up to?" asked Hackbit.

"I don't know."

"Perhaps the mother will come to," suggested Hackbit.

Mr. Rimmon was seeking his nephew in the crowd, and at last perceived him, and with a mortified shock, for mortified it was, he recognised his daughter, and went up to her.

She was safe then; and what a scandal it all was, her disappearance, and her turning up like this, more like a ghost than a living girl! Still, there was a spark of tenderness in his voice as he said, "Kizzy, my child!" And truly he was alarmed enough when he saw the change that had come over her in little more than a week. The round plump face had grown so pointed and meagre, the lips were pale and drawn, and the dark eyes stared out from their hollow depths, with a dull look of misery in them.

"Come home with thy father, child," said Mr. Rimmon, heartily ashamed of his work, though never thinking of undeceiving his daughter.

"Let us look for the child's mother," said Hackbit, and the three moved with difficulty towards a spot where the crowd was not quite so thick, except in the centre of it, where there existed a kind of nucleus

closely set round one object of interest. It was the figure of a young girl who could scarcely be twenty from her looks. One of the numerous doctors upon the spot were examining her as Hackbit drew near, and he very soon remarked that her trouble was over, at any rate; she was dead.

"Has this poor girl no relatives, no one who would take charge of the baby?" asked Mr. Rimmon of the bystanders.

"She has neither kith nor kin, neither has her poor master, who lies burnt to a cinder, worse luck, at the bottom of the mine."

"Come home with me, Kizzy," said Mr. Rimmon again. "I will try and be kind to you;" and he made no objection to her carrying the baby with her.

As they passed through Jumley town, the numerous low public houses blazed out upon the darkness, and were dealing out their liquors to distracted women who had come to drown their grief; vile traps, catching the miserable, and heaping anguish upon them under the guise of comfort.

The lurid glow of the furnaces lit their path for a while with an unnatural light, making the darkness of the Old Park, to be traversed afterwards, doubly dark. Hackbit, at all times disliking this place, disliked it excessively to-night, and thought grimly of the uncovered pits. This did not prevent his offering to carry the baby, but Kizzy would not give it up. It was asleep and warm under her cloak. To his uncle he said in a low tone, "Above all, cross her in nothing." Unnecessary advice, however, for Mr. Rimmon was not disposed to cross her.

At the end of the Old Park, Hackbit left his uncle and cousin, and retraced his steps. He was soon again in the place of his antipathy, and carefully noted each step he took. He had got about half-way across, when a rumbling sound, followed by a crash, startled him. It was one of the threatened houses giving way. No doubt the tenants were up at the mine.

As Hackbit passed through the town, he was much tempted to enter one of the public-houses, but he resisted the temptation. "Hang it all," he thought, "let me go into the jaws of death sober."

When he reached the pit's mouth, a cage was waiting to be lowered. "Wait for me," he cried. Murdock was in the cage. "Don't you go, for God's sake," Hackbit said. "You are needed to right the wrongs."

There is nothing extraordinary in this bravery on the part of Hackbit.

No Black Country man is a coward. All are alike ready in these emergencies. There is never a cry for volunteers.

There was a lull in the crowd as the cage was lowered and those few brave men descended to rescue some few, if possible, of the hundreds shut up in that fiery prison.

A white-chokered young gentleman of some three-and-twenty years, with a very wide-brimmed clerical hat, ventured to make a remark to some women in his neighbourhood, about submitting themselves to the will of Providence.

"Shut thy — mouth," cried one of the women, "or we'll chuck thee down th' pit."

They looked so much like carrying out the threat that the curate moved away as fast as he could with any dignity. Some jeers were thrown after him, and one of the women said, "It's always the same gate. We mun be patient, when wages is so low as we havener enow to eat. If our children die of th' fever, or our lads i' th' explosion, it's the visitation of God. Oh, it's the plague o' parsons is the worst plague the Lord ever sent us—curse them."

These words fell on the ear of an elderly clergyman, who was standing by, hoping to be of use to somebody; and he said to the woman who had spoken, very gently, and with much bitterness—

"We clergy are great blunderers, I fear; but, believe me, we would do better if we knew how. Indeed, my heart bleeds for you to-night."

"Ah! if all th' parsons was like you, we wouldner curse them," replied the woman.

There seemed to be something happening at the pit's mouth now. The crowd moved as near as it dared to the circle of the doctors. The signal had been given to draw up the cage. The crowd yelled like demons as the machinery was set in motion, and the rope flew over the pulley. "Stand back," cried the police. The mouth of the pit was filled by an object rising. It was the cage. The torches revealed Hackbit and another, each with a black burden in his arms. The charred masses they carried were human beings. Blankets were held by the four corners, in readiness, and the poor wretches were placed in them and carried to the waggons.

The crowd had almost to be beaten back now, it surged so powerfully towards the bodies, in order, if possible, to recognize them; but they were unrecognizable.

"The fire's still burning in the north cutting," said Hackbit. "We daren't go near there."

The signal was given to lower, and down went those brave men again. After the fourth descent they were so exhausted that new volunteers came forward.

In the course of the night, some thirty bodies, six of which were just alive, were brought up. The rest were nothing but cinders.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT HOME AGAIN.

IN the meantime, Kizzy and her father and the little orphan baby had reached the dismal house.

The door was opened by Mrs. Rimmon herself. She uttered a loud cry on seeing her daughter. She woke the baby, and it began to wail piteously.

Mrs. Rimmon was not at all surprised to see the baby. She was accustomed to her daughter's taking to all kinds of waifs and strays. It was Kizzy she was surprised to see.

When Kizzy had been placed in her father's chair, she smiled faintly, and asked that the baby might be fed. Mrs. Rimmon busied herself in taking off her daughter's shoes and stockings; they were soaking wet. She then proceeded to put the little white feet into a hot bath, and Sarah, having fed the baby and placed it in an improvised bassinette, brought some tea for her young mistress in an incredibly short time.

Kizzy tried to raise her head from the chair, but she could not: so Sarah raised her and gave her the tea. A kind of fog gathered on the girl's mind, and she seemed to be in a different place, with different people; yet she frequently recurred to the baby, and asked piteously that it might be looked after.

"It's fast asleep like a little angel," said Sarah, "in a clothes basket by the kitchen fire."

Kizzy closed her eyes on hearing this, and remained white and motionless.

"Don't you think we had better send for the doctor?" suggested Mrs. Rimmon in a frightened whisper.

"We could get no doctor if we sent," replied her husband. "You know they are all busy at the pit. Hadn't I better carry her up to bed?"

While they were debating this question there was a sound of wheels.

They stopped opposite the house, and there was a ring at the door. Sarah hurried to it, in no good humour; she was afraid the baby might wake. Standing before her at the door, whom should she see but Mr. Saltring, with a red muffler at his neck, rivalling his red whiskers, and behind him crept Jubal.

"Good heart alive, girl," said Mr. Saltring to Sarah, who stood still, not offering to ask him in, "you are Sarah, aren't you? You addressed your letter all wrong, and it has only come to us to-night."

"Oh, come in, sir," said Sarah, who had now recovered herself; "she's come back to-night, sir, and she looks awful."

Mr. Saltring presented himself without ceremony before Mr. Rimmon, whose breath was nearly taken away by the sudden appearance. These gentlemen had never met before, though they knew each other by reputation.

"We've posted all the way," said Mr. Saltring; "we only heard to-night of your misfortune."

"It was very good of you," responded Mr. Rimmon, coldly.

"You see," said Mr. Saltring, a little quenched by this frigidity, "the poor boy couldn't rest, so I brought him."

Jubal had kept carefully in the shadow of Mr. Saltring all this time, but at these words he ventured to make himself visible. He instantly caught sight of the deathly face of his sister, and cried, "Oh, Mr. Saltring, do look at Kizzy."

Mr. Saltring stepped from behind the door, which had hitherto hidden Keziah from him. "Good heart alive, man," he exclaimed, addressing Mr. Rimmon. "Lord have mercy on us all for a pack of fools!"

While Mr. Rimmon was searching in his brains for the meaning of this remark, Mr. Saltring had unbuttoned his ponderous overcoat and taken out a flask of brandy, and was applying it to Keziah's lips.

"On my soul, I never saw such a lovely creature in my life," he exclaimed.

"My daughter's a teetotaller," gasped Mr. Rimmon.

"Rubbish!" said Mr. Saltring, continuing to give the brandy.

The girl's eyes opened, and Mr. Saltring said, in a coaxing tone, "There, there; that's better, pretty dear." Her velvet eyes fastened on him for a moment, and a faint smile flickered on her face and went out.

Mr. Saltring was thinking, "How is it possible such a girl can ever have been born in Jumley?"

Jubal was standing near quite boldly now. He did not feel so much afraid when Mr. Saltring was in the house.

Kizzy moved a little. Mr. Saltring got up from his kneeling position, pushed the table out of the way, and hoisted the great sofa towards the fire.

Mr. Rimmon's face was stony as he watched these proceedings.

"Now, if we had some pillows and blankets," suggested Mr. Saltring to Mrs. Rimmon; and while she went to fetch them he emptied the coal-box on the fire.

Kizzy was speedily made comfortable on the sofa.

It must have been nearly two o'clock in the morning; but this was not the only household up in Jumley. No one went to bed in explosion times, even of those not concerned; and, as a proof of this, the door next opened to admit the head of Miss Dorcas Rimmon, who, having heard that Kizzy had been found, had come up to verify the fact.

"Oh!" she observed, in a spiteful tone, "I didn't know there was company;" and she was about to bounce back again, when Mr. Saltring said—

"My name is Samuel Saltring; you may have heard of me. You must be a Rimmon, from the family likeness."

"Yes, I am Miss Rimmon," that lady acknowledged; and she looked over the back of the sofa. "So she's come back, is she, the ungrateful little wretch."

Mr. Rimmon touched his sister gently with his foot, to warn her to be silent.

"No, Joshua, I won't be quiet," said Miss Dorcas, defiantly. "You've no need to kick me. I shall say what I like."

"Then I would say it in a quieter tone, if I were you, considering all things," put in Mr. Saltring.

"It's nothing to do with you," rejoined Miss Dorcas, narrowing her eyes as she looked at him.

"I'll give you a bit of advice," retorted the bluff wine-merchant: "If you'd keep better tempered you'd be better looking."

"Please remember you are not in your own house," Mr. Rimmon remarked to Mr. Saltring.

"Now, look here," said the honest fellow, kindness shining in his face, "you don't want to be told I mean well. Let us be agreeable. Think of the dear child lying there."

Miss Dorcas tossed her head.

"You will let me stay and help you nurse her to-night," said Mr. Saltring to Mrs. Rimmon. "I know a lot about nursing sick folk."

The next to appear on the scene was Thomas Hackbit, who had by this time refreshed himself at one of the low inns still open. He tried hard to look sober, but his head nodded in a ghastly manner, and he hiccuped between every word he tried to speak. He at once recognized Saltring as a friend, though he had never set eyes on him before.

"Glad to see you, old chap," he said.

"Get away out of the house, you disgusting brute," exclaimed Miss Dorcas, as Hackbit, smiling inanely, advanced towards Mr. Saltring.

"Take no notish of her," remarked Hackbit confidentially in Saltring's ear. "She'sh cat. Deucedly ugly, isn't she? Oh, Lord, she's millinersh dressmakersh."

Mr. Rimmon tried to explain that Mr. Hackbit was a little unsteady, owing to his having been down a coal-mine rescuing burning men.

"He's been somewhere else since, I should think," observed Mr. Saltring, smiling in spite of himself.

At the sound of Mr. Rimmon's voice Hackbit began again.

"He'sh an old fool, too. He drove Keziah away, forged letters, made her believe——"

"For God's sake, hush!" burst forth Mr. Rimmon.

"Now he'sh shwearin'," said Hackbit, smiling benignly. "He'sh good man, he ish; prayer-meetingsh, Bible-classes. He getsh drunk and shplits things, he doesh."

Dorcas here gave him a friendly poke.

"What are you doing?" he began, turning on her. "You've left your 'prentish out waiting for you. I metsh her. I kished her."

This was too much for Miss Dorcas, who explained that she had brought Miss Timmins up with her for company, and had not thought it worth while to ask her in, as she was only come for a minute.

"Leave her there bitsh longer," said Hackbit, cocking his hat on the back of his head. "You go home yoursself. Nobody wantsh kish you."

Mr. Hackbit next announced his intention of spending the remainder of the night at his uncle's, and had of necessity to be accommodated.

But none of these episodes disturbed Kizzy, who was in a sound sleep.

The slow winter morning broke, and stole feebly over the objects in the room where Kizzy lay, the deep silky fringes of her eyes resting on the pallid cheeks. The weary mother had fallen asleep, too; and Mr. Saltring sat near the couch, with his head drooping on his chest till his

bald head, rather than his face, looked towards Kizzy; but he was not asleep. When at last Sarah made her appearance, Kizzy opened her eyes with a frightened look, and sighed deeply. Mr. Saltring was beside her in a moment. "Come, we are better," he said cheerfully. "Four hours' sleep at a stretch. Now, Sarah, my lass, an egg beaten up in milk, please." He gave it to the girl with all the gentleness of a woman, and all the tact, and was rewarded by a pathetic smile. This over, he asked Sarah if he might have a wash. She looked somewhat uneasy.

"Well, sir," she said, "Mr. Hackbit have got the spare room, and Master Jubal, he wouldn't sleep with his father, and Miss Dorcas wouldn't go home, neither, after what Mr. Hackbit said, and she and Miss Timmins are in Miss Kizzy's room——"

"Oh, all right," said Mr. Saltring, "I'll go into Jubal's room." But when he tried the door he found it locked, and after knocking several times and receiving no answer, he concluded that he would go to the room Hackbit occupied, and not disturb the poor lad. "I needn't wake Mr. Hackbit," he said.

The door proved not to be locked; and, softly entering, he beheld Hackbit in a profound sleep, with his arms thrown over the back of his head. He had evidently felt cold, for he had taken down the bed-curtains and put them across the bed; also, the hearth-rug. Mr. Saltring could scarcely help laughing. Hackbit's own garments—that is, some of them—lay on the floor, close to the door. His boots, however, could be seen nowhere at first. On looking more closely, they were discovered poking out at the foot of the bed, on the owner's feet.

Mr. Saltring poured out some water very quietly, but he disturbed the sleeper nevertheless, and a faint voice from the bed said, "What's that?"

Mr. Saltring made an apology for his intrusion.

"Don't mention it," said Hackbit, holding his head tightly between his hands; "but I haven't the pleasure of knowing you, have I?"

"No," replied Mr. Saltring; and he then explained himself.

"I'm afraid I must have been drunk last night," said Hackbit. "She didn't see me, did she?—Kizzy, I mean."

"She was too ill."

"Thank Heaven for that, at any rate. I'm a fool to drink. Nobody knows it better than I do. I should leave it off if I'd a wife and a comfortable home."

"My dear sir," rejoined Mr. Saltring impressively, "a man should

conquer his faults before his marriage, and not subject a good woman to the chance of his experiment failing afterwards."

"Yes, you are right. But it's very hard to give up one's only comfort, and nothing to replace it."

"Don't be in bondage. Make up your mind never to taste another drop." And now, having completed his toilet, Mr. Saltring hastened down to his patient.

Mr. Rimmon had come down by this time. Kizzy was looking round for Mr. Saltring, and gladdened at his approach. "She's looking better, isn't she?" he observed to Mr. Rimmon. "A change of air would be the very thing for her. Let me take her to Langton with me to-day, and we will return her to you in perfect health, God permitting."

Mr. Rimmon found it desirable to accept this offer for many reasons. He was very glad when he discovered that Mr. Saltring wished Jubal to go back with him, too. As for Kizzy herself, her apathy was too great for her to express a choice at all. They might do what they liked with her, she said, so long as the baby was looked after:

"The baby shall go too," said Mr. Saltring. "There are nurses enough at our house, I guess; and if anybody lays claim to it, they can easily have it."

When they had all started in the phaeton, Sarah wrote and informed Mrs. Beredith of what had occurred. She could not say where Kizzy had been, however, during her absence, as she had preserved a strict silence on that point, and Mr. Saltring would not have her questioned.

CHAPTER XIV.

MAUD HARWYN.

MAUD HARWYN, though a young lady of considerable personal attractions, and therefore especially exposed to criticism, inhabited a house on her own responsibility at Bowdon, near Manchester. She was an orphan, and lived with only two female servants, except when her brother Gerald was at home from Birmingham. Many of her friends thought this highly improper; but it was one of Maud's characteristics not to bow to Mrs. Grundy. Her schoolmaster brother did not disapprove of her, however; and her father must have trusted her, for he placed her under no guardian, though he left her a large fortune. The reader has already seen that Lawyer Layton and his wife were strong

adherents of Miss Harwyn. They had, nevertheless, urged upon her the desirability of engaging an elderly companion to live with her; but she was not open to reason.

About a week after the events recorded in the last chapter, she was seated sipping her tea, in a perfect bower of a sitting-room, quite alone, with an air of complacency and thorough independence that men would scarcely give solitary women credit for. She was looking caressingly upon her pretty feet, placed upon the fender. They were cased in slippers of the gayest and daintiest. She made no secret of the fact that it was of grave importance to her to be well dressed. She wished to be beautiful, and she thought it was for herself alone that she wished it.

Her house, planned by herself, was like no other. One could not see it without thoughts of harmony, and sunshine, and warm summer days. This girl was an artist, though a certain indolence born of wealth had kept her talent in the dark. Her house, as much as the pictures in her studio, spoke of this. Her studio opened into the dining-room on one side and the drawing-room on the other. The studio was also a music-room, and, in addition to a piano, contained a harp, a violin, and a guitar. On two or three easels stood unfinished canvasses. The room itself was panelled, and every panel contained a painting, Maud's own work. Near a low couch was a circular bookcase on wheels, of her own designing. By the easiest motion it would turn round when she wished to change a volume.

This was essentially a gay room, but, as a contrast, her dining-room was grim and sombre. She had travelled all over Europe in search of weird pictures for this room; and every evening when she dined alone there she had the apartment lit by wax candles enough to have illuminated a ball-room.

While she was drinking her tea on the afternoon referred to, Maud's housemaid brought to her a message from the next villa, The Chestnuts. Miss Harwyn was begged to come in there, as an old lady was seriously ill, and the gentleman did not like to leave her without somebody besides his servants, while he rode to Manchester to fetch a doctor.

Maud went without a moment's hesitation, and a neat servant showed her to the old lady's room. The house was smaller than Maud's, and differed from it in every way, and it had an old-fashioned air, and a certain stiffness and dulness about it. The bed-room she was shown into was hot and rather stifling. Maud at once glanced towards the four-post bedstead with its white hangings. Rolling restlessly upon the pillow lay an aged head,

Maud said to the servant, "Haven't you another spare room with a bed without hangings in it?"

"No; there were hangings just like this in all the rooms."

Maud placed a screen beside the bed, and opened a window, and the fresh air revived the old lady a little; and she said feebly—

"I don't think this is the house."

"Oh, yes, it is," said Maud gently; "you are all right."

"I knew I should come to it," was the old lady's reply.

"Why, of course," said Maud, not in the least understanding.

The old lady glanced towards the foot of the bed and observing a large fire, said in alarm, "Take some of the coal off, my dear, your father will be so angry."

Maud now became certain that the old lady was wandering, and determined to pacify her to the utmost, so actually removed a little of the coal; and the old lady rambled on.

"Jubal's a big boy. He'll disagree with his father soon."

"How odd!" thought Maud. "I really believed there was but one Jubal in the world, and now here's another;" and her mind went back to Langton, and to her brother's pupil who was visiting at the Saltrings'. She began to bathe the old lady's head with eau de Cologne which she had thoughtfully put into her pocket. The old lady went to sleep under the influence of this, and Maud sat down to wait for the unknown master of the house to relieve her vigil. She knew him by sight, but was unacquainted with his name.

It was late before he returned. On entering the bedroom he gravely held out his hand to his neighbour, and began to thank her for her great kindness.

"Oh, don't thank me, I have done nothing," she said, with a frank smile. Then she added, "But I don't know your name."

"My name is David Rimmon."

"Then, Mr. Rimmon, can I be of any further use to you?"

"I have troubled you too much already," said David. "The room is scented like a bower: I am sure that is your doing. But, if I might ask you one thing more, would you wait till the doctor has seen mother? You would understand his directions better than I could, and explain them to my housekeeper."

"But would she like my interfering?" said Maud with some hesitation.

"Well," replied David nervously, "she's rather deaf, and has a way

of pretending to hear when she doesn't, to hide it. And I think you would make her understand."

Maud consented at once, and David went downstairs to bring up the doctor. That gentleman meanwhile had been growing very impatient. He had examined minutely every print in the room, and had fallen out with the roses on the wall-paper, had sat down on each chair in succession, to try their relative comfort, and had finally stationed himself with his back to the fire, his eye fixed on the staircase, visible through the open door, his ear turned slightly upwards, to catch any sound from above. Mr. Rimmon had kept him longer than he had intended, having been very slow in the delivery of his remarks to Maud ; and after leaving her, he had stood several moments on the dark landing, meditating.

The doctor did not meet him cordially. He had not even been appeased by a glass of wine. This had been entirely an oversight on Mr. Rimmon's part, but the doctor felt it nevertheless. He could only show it in one way. It was by increased gravity and severity of demeanour. He also waited for Mr. Rimmon to begin, which was always difficult for David. The two looked at each other in silence for some seconds, when the doctor, in his impatience, by the sudden raising of his boot, knocked the fire-irons down, causing a great noise. He turned very red at the accident, and solemnly replaced the fire-irons ; then, thoroughly out of temper, faced Mr. Rimmon, and observed frigidly—

"I can't conceive why people put fire-irons on those eminences. Everybody is certain to knock them down."

Mr. Rimmon meekly replied that they were awkward, and asked the doctor in a most conciliatory tone, if he would mind stepping upstairs.

"Mind?" rejoined the doctor irritably. "It's my business, I suppose."

Mr. Rimmon led the way, wondering what could be the cause of the doctor's snappishness.

We are not going to represent Mrs. Rimmon as an interesting patient, nor that she excited strong sympathy in Maud Harwyn. This world's sufferers are frequently uninteresting to a stranger ; their aspect is often forbidding ; and though their condition is compassionated, they can find sympathy for themselves, alas too often, only with God.

Miss Harwyn's visit to David Rimmon was by no means her last ; for as the days wore on, it became a constant thing for the neighbours to see her entering his house ; and Maud was not better thought of in con-

sequence. It was another strange proceeding of this very strange young lady ; and to be strange is quite reason enough for a girl's being placed outside the charmed circle of good and discreet society. Some writer has said that "one can only be strange by being wise and good ;" and Miss Harwyn's neighbours, to whom she was ministering, certainly did not think her strange, unless in this sense.

Mrs. Rimmon had recovered remarkably under her ministration, and had learned to listen impatiently for her visitor's footstep. She was soon able to sit up, and her chair was placed near the window, in view of the large garden, where, winter though it was, an air of cheerfulness reigned. It was a particularly good year for holly-berries, and the old lady's eyes were gladdened by the sight of them, and by the congregations of robins and sparrows feasting unmolested. Sometimes Mrs. Rimmon would sit silent for a long time together, looking out of this window ; but if Maud offered to go, she would become querulous at once.

One afternoon they were sitting together thus, when Mrs. Rimmon suddenly began comparing her present outlook with the Old Park at Jumley ; and though her account was such that Maud understood very little of it, she nevertheless listened patiently. Thus encouraged, this desolate creature opened her heart more and more : but Maud had a way of inviting confidence.

Even David had begun to talk freely with her. He had gone so far as to tell her something of his niece and her sad story, omitting mention of his brother, however, for on this point he was very sensitive. As a boy, his elder brother had been upright in all his dealings, severe always, yet not more so with others than with himself ; and David had grown up with a reverence for this brother, whom he felt to be beyond the comprehension of his feebler brain. And now that deep down and hidden away in his heart this idol lay broken, the fact was as far out of his consciousness as he could put it. It is to be questioned whether he had even thought this in words. Some lingering, vague comfort he stored up, as do thousands of other hearts in like trouble—the vague and lingering hope that there might be some mistake, some extenuating circumstance not brought to light. And why deny these hearts their feeble and sad solace ? David had not seen Maud for more than a few minutes at a time, except on Saturday afternoons, when he returned early from business ; yet these fleeting moments had in a short week grown inexpressibly dear to him. Maud, perceiving that he cared to talk to her, humoured his fancy, and gave him opportunities of seeing her, and brightened her own

life by this kindness to another. If she could have foreseen the future, how she would have withheld this sweet cup from his lips !

Kizzy's story had been related to her in fragments, and at several different times ; and Miss Harwyn, enthusiastic and compassionate, had told David that, when his mother should be well enough to spare her, she would go to her friends at Langton for a day or two and endeavour to make Kizzy's acquaintance. Her further intention was to bring the young lady to Bowdon to stay with her, if they got on well together.

In about a month from the time of Kizzy's going to the Saltrings', Maud set out for Langton, and her heart was singing ; for she thought, here was a justifiable opportunity of once more meeting Tom Towers. She was also in high spirits at the prospect of finding a girl-friend, a luxury all her money had not brought her.

When the evening of the day of Maud's departure had come, and her bright face had never once penetrated the old-fashioned parlour of her neighbour's house, the heart of David Rimmon fell within him. The light of his life seemed to have died, and his spirit, slow always, was for once startled into a vivid life, and into the acknowledgment that this fair creature was more to him than anything else in the world. Although this truth had penetrated his consciousness, it still suggested no consequences. It was a single absorbing thought of adoration, unmingled with desire.

CHAPTER XV.

A STRANGE PROPOSAL.

KIZZY speedily became quite at home in her new surroundings ; and, though a trifle pale, she looked much like her old self. There was one striking difference, however. She never laughed now. The Saltrings, not having known her until her trouble had come upon her, did not notice this. Her sorrow had seemed to heighten her beauty and etherealise it. There was only one person in this establishment who did not yield a willing devotion to this queen of beauty and of sweet manners. That was Laura. This young lady gave Kizzy many an unhappy moment when no one else was by ; and Kizzy accepted all this with a certain gentleness and forbearance which had been foreign to her before this trial.

The Towers had been unremitting in their attentions, and had had

grave fears for the poor girl at first, and had seen her steady improvement with some surprise. She never spoke of her trouble, and no one referred to it, unless it might be Laura. Kizzy had made a resolve that, though she had been bitterly separated from her lover, it should not wreck her life. Although her sweet dream had been thus harshly dispelled, there still remained to her the happy past, and the power of praying for him ; and, above all, there rose up for her consolation the thought that in another world they might meet again, his crime washed away. The poor girl literally lived in this thought.

Her father had been to Langton to see her, and she had treated him with much gentle affection. If her heart made excuses for one man who had sinned, ought it not also to do the same for her father ?

One other trouble had come upon Keziah. Mrs. Beredith was angry with her. She reproached her for not making her house her home in her affliction. But this was not so much the cause of her anger. It was that Keziah evidently believed in Rupert's guilt. This lady, who could have staked her life on Kizzy's fidelity, now found her resigned to a separation, and resolved to return no more to Leamington. Alas, poor Kizzy ! no one knew what a proof she had in her possession of her lover's guilt. Whether he got off or not, the fact remained the same.

Kizzy was thinking over all this one morning with a great deal of misgiving, when Miss Harwyn was announced. Mrs. Saltring strongly urged Kizzy to see her, as Miss Harwyn had expressed such an earnest desire to make her acquaintance.

Kizzy was upstairs, in a sitting-room devoted to her during her illness, and was engaged upon some work for Mrs. Saltring. She could never be anywhere without being helpful to those around her. As Mrs. Saltring held the door open for Miss Harwyn to pass in, Kizzy mentally contrasted the two—Mrs. Saltring, round, plump, and small, with house and baby stamped upon her face, though in a pleasing way ; Miss Harwyn, tall and majestic, with an air of freedom in her whole attitude which seemed to belong to some wild bird sojourning a moment among men, with the consciousness that presently the grand wings can carry him far away to his native haunts. Kizzy did not think this in so many words, but the words describe the impression made on her mind.

The two girls shook hands frankly, and Maud seated herself near Keziah ; and Mrs. Saltring, on the plea of some household duty, went away. She had more than once found Miss Harwyn a little too much for her. When the door had closed behind her, Maud, as if attracted by

a magnet, passed her arm round Kizzy's slender waist, and gently kissed her, saying with a rich smile—

"Whom do you think I saw a few days ago?"

"I can have no idea," responded Keziah wearily.

"It was your uncle David and your grandmamma."

"Where did you see them?"

"In their own house. They are my neighbours."

"Oh, do tell me about them," said Kizzy, a rich glow passing over her features.

"What a complexion!" thought Maud. "Who ever could paint it?" Then Maud in the prettiest conceivable way explained how they had become acquainted, and spoke nothing of her own kindness, but very much in praise of David's kindheartedness. "And do you know," said Maud, "when your uncle talked about you, I thought to myself 'here is another girl as lonely as I am. Why shouldn't we be together?'"

"But you don't know anything about me," Kizzy replied, shaking her head doubtfully.

"Well," said Maud, "people call me impulsive. I never give ideas time to develop. I act on them straight away; and if ever I regret, I just bear the thing alone, and don't trouble other people with my regrets. I have a great longing to have you with me, partly because I think you are very little like me in character; and when we know each other," she put in mischievously, "we shall quarrel on most subjects, and, you know, I rather like that; and, forgive me for saying it—you may believe me, because I am a woman speaking to a woman—you are so beautiful, you would be a continual feast to my eyes."

The rich colour mounted to Kizzy's pale cheek again at this frank compliment, and then the tears gathered in her eyes, and she said despairingly—

"That seems to be of no consequence to me now."

Maud was infinitely touched, and she kissed away the tears in a sweet, frank way all her own. "I won't take no. You must come and live with me," she said. "I fell in love with you by hearsay first, but the sight of you—well, I wonder you've not been carried off like the girls in romances."

"Dear Miss Harwyn," Kizzy began, "it's very good of you; but I ought to tell you how I am placed. I did not get on very well with father at home, and I got myself a situation; but perhaps uncle told you this. I cannot go back home, and I cannot go back to that situation. I have been ill, and I have been here I don't know how many weeks. It is quite

time I went away now. If it were not for this, I would have stayed with you a little time, you speak so kindly ; and I never saw any one I liked so much."

"Of course, I have not made myself understood," Maud broke out. "I rarely do when I want to most. I understood perfectly that you wanted a situation. Everybody wants me to have some cross old fogey for a companion ; but I've always obstinately refused. I want some one young, to enter into my schemes, and enjoy life with me ; but mammas are so strict now-a-days, they wouldn't think of letting their daughters come to me ; for, do you know, I live all by myself in a house."

Keziah looked startled.

"That is, with two servants—one old enough to be my mother. But you seem to be able to please yourself, so if you came to me nobody would interfere with you, and you would have relatives next door. The only thing I stipulate for, if you accept my offer, and you shall—you most certainly shall—is that there shall be no question of money between us."

Kizzy was about to interrupt.

"Don't interrupt me," said Maud. "I want to explain my plan. On the first day of every month I get a certain sum from my bankers ; I am so stupidly rich, you know. I keep two purses—one for housekeeping, the other for my nondescript expenditure. I shall keep another purse now for you, and put in it as much as I put in the last for myself ; and I am so extravagant, I am sure you will find it enough."

She was much surprised that Kizzy did not close with this at once. She answered the look of the girl rather than any words.

"That is very unkind of you," Maud exclaimed. "Why should you not come to me as well as to anyone else ?"

"You don't understand me," replied Kizzy. "Your plan is like my being dependent upon you. I cannot be that. If I come to you, I must come for a small salary such as I am worth. I cannot receive benefits from you which would close my mouth and take away my freedom." And here a proud look came into the fine face, yet calm and gentle, which somewhat abashed her companion. The tears welled up into Maud's eyes.

"I can't expect you to know me in one meeting," she said.

"That is true," replied Kizzy, with gentle dignity. "It is true for both of us. Had you known me, you could not have made me such a proposal."

"And had you known me," rejoined Maud, "I think you would have accepted it."

Kizzy gently shook her head. "We cannot begin," she said, "where we have only a faint chance of ending. Your plan should be the result of years of testing, and of coming together, so to speak. To try to begin so would be to kill every possibility. You are all kindness, I see it in your face. Yet you want to clip my wings, you who can go everywhere and do everything. You like to spend your pounds, feeling they are your own. Leave me to spend my pence feeling they are my own."

"You despise my plan," replied Maud; "but yours is ridiculous. If we're to go on for years, laying traps for each other, and keeping up the very widest and strongest distinction of *meum* and *tuum*, where would it all end? We should never trust each other at all."

"You forget," responded Kizzy gravely, "that your proposal demands exorbitant trust on my part, and leaves you still free."

"At any rate," went on Maud, growing desperate, "who knows where we shall be before years enough pass to try your way? You will be marrying and going away from me."

There was something like scorn in Kizzy's face as she said, still with calmness, "I don't think I am likely to marry, Miss Harwyn. I was on the point of it once, and it all ends there."

"Your uncle told me about your trouble," said Maud compassionately.

"Uncle didn't know much," replied Kizzy dreamily. "Nobody knows much but myself."

"But nothing is proved against your lover yet, Kizzy," said Maud, calling her by her Christian name for the first time.

Kizzy put her hands out before her as if to ward off a blow, and said in a voice much like a cry, "Do not speak of it, you cannot understand it. I have never told anybody the rights of it all. I went away, I can't remember where I went. I hoped I should die. I remember nights passed in a deserted house, where there were rumblings underneath. I wanted it to fall in on me, and bury me for ever. Houses often fall about there; and there was an explosion. I know that is true, and that I did not dream it, because the baby's here now; and somehow a thought came to me, that I might perhaps work out the salvation of both of us, and he and I might meet again in another world."

Maud did not understand all this. How should she, unless she had known of the forged letter?

"I know about the baby," Maud said. "We will have the baby with us. You shall come to me on what terms you like, if you will only come. You shall be my model, my guide; you shall save me from my selfish self."

It's a revelation to see one so high-souled and so beautiful at once. Now, say, when can you be ready to come to me?"

"I must go home for a few days," said Keziah. "I have not seen mother since I was ill. And please, Miss Harwyn, don't talk to me as you have done just now. Indeed, you don't know my heart. What you talk of is only what I want to be, not what I am."

"Well, well, you can't change my opinions," replied Maud. "But, won't you show me the baby you rescued?"

"Gladly," said Keziah, and the two girls went together to the nursery.

On her way home to the Laytons', Maud was so preoccupied about Keziah, that she twice failed to recognize people she knew perfectly well. One of these sharply reined up his horse, and dismounting, gravely held out his hand and said, "This is not kind of you, Miss Harwyn, to torture me with the sight of you, when we can never be anything to each other, never."

"Am I never to come near my friends, Mr. Towers, because you take a foolish fancy into your head?" said Maud, her indignation rising against him.

"I thought you would understand, Miss Harwyn, that I am bound hand and foot, that I can marry nobody, much less you."

"Do you think you could marry me if you liked?" rejoined Maud, hot and angry. "You talk as if I were only waiting for you to ask me to accept you. Ah, Mr. Towers, had you been a man of money and position, you would not have found me so lenient as I have shown myself."

"That is only your way of upbraiding me for not being a man of money and position," retorted Towers with equal bitterness.

"If I wanted to upbraid you," replied Maud, "I would not go round-about. I do upbraid you for not working better, and getting your qualification."

"How can outsiders judge of one's situation? You are very unjust to me."

"I dare say I think better of you than you deserve."

Towers coloured. "To hear you talk, one would think you hated me," he said.

"I have a very real contempt for a man who, at thirty years of age, settles down without a qualification he has been trying after all his life."

"Your words are very cruel, more cruel than you think," said the doctor, mounting his horse, and riding rapidly away.

CHAPTER XVI.

SHADOWS OF COMING EVENTS.

WHEN Kizzy reached Jumley railway station, she found her cousin waiting for her with her father's dogtrap. Mr. Hackbit, not at all sure of his ground, made no imprudent overtures. A loving nature is sensitive to kindness ; and Mr. Hackbit lost no opportunity, however trivial, of showing her respectful attention.

When the cousins had got inside the house, it became evident to them both that a difference of opinion was occurring in the dining-room, and that it was taking the form of rather violent language. But this was nothing new to either of them.

The disputants were Joshua Rimmon and his sister Dorcas. Kizzy looked at her cousin resignedly. They knew by past experience that this dispute might last for hours.

Sarah fairly cried for joy at sight of her young mistress, though the poor girl had something else to cry for, her lover having been brought up as black as a cinder, from the pit, three days after the explosion in the Troworth Hill mines.

"Oh, never mind, Miss Kizzy," she said, referring to the disturbance in the house. "Your mother's in the kitchen."

Mrs. Rimmon, however, had heard the voices, and was close upon them ; and she began to hug her daughter with a vehemence that was quite astonishing from one of her apathetic temperament.

Mr. Hackbit, with great unconcern, entered the room where his uncle and aunt were disputing.

Mr. Rimmon was seated in his own chair by the fire, with his back towards his sister, who for her part was standing like an offended deity, at a little distance, bonneted and shawled. Neither of them took any notice of their nephew ; they continued their discussion.

"It will injure my position very much indeed, your taking to going to Church," said Mr. Rimmon.

"Injure you, indeed," burst forth Miss Dorcas, tossing her head energetically. "And who are you, I should like to know?"

"I'll tell you what people will say," said Mr. Rimmon, looking into the fire. "They will say you have gone to run after the new curate."

"Me run after him!" shrieked the offended spinster. "And hadn't he been at least a dozen times in my shop before I entered his church?"

And didn't he say to me, 'It would make me happier if I saw you in church, Miss Rimmon?'"

"No doubt," said Joshua sardonically. "It would make him happy to see me there too, and every dissenter in Jumley. For my part, I wonder you can sit in the church and see all those boys in nightgowns, and such a waste of candles, and hear him in that ridiculous tone of voice read a sermon somebody else has written."

"Somebody else has written!" reiterated Miss Dorcas in a furious voice. "You couldn't write a sermon at any rate; no, not if he paid you ten thousand pounds to do it."

"I've no ambition that way," observed Mr. Rimmon, superciliously.

"I know better than that," sneered his sister. "You'd give anything to be on the plan, and be a local preacher."

"I'm not very likely to be anything, if you're disgracing the family in this way."

"Disgrace the family by marrying a gentleman of position, who has been at Oxford!"

"Oh, so you're engaged to him, are you? Poor fellow."

"If I'm not exactly engaged to him, I shall be soon."

At this point the spinster heard a chuckle behind her; and turning round, beheld her nephew immersed in a newspaper, with no signs of laughter upon his face. She turned angrily upon him.

"You needn't pretend you were not laughing, Thomas."

"I'm not pretending anything," observed Hackbit, unconcernedly.

"Oh, aren't you! You're a credit to the family anyway, you are, Thomas, getting drunk and behaving like a beast, and kissing low girls."

"I haven't kissed any low girls," replied the nephew, with a half-smile upon his countenance.

"Haven't you, indeed?" rejoined his aunt, raising her voice. "I suppose you didn't confess, then, that you had kissed Martha Timmins at this very door?"

"Oh, is she a low girl?" asked Hackbit abstractedly. "I didn't know you kept any low girls; I thought all your people were young ladies."

"Well, what do you want to quarrel with me for?" replied his aunt peevishly.

"Well, really, I am not aware that I began it."

"I daresay not. You never do anything wrong. You are a pattern of all the virtues, you are."

"Pile it up," observed Hackbit, going on reading.

"Pile what up?" enquired Dorcas, not understanding. "What do you mean? Something vulgar, I imagine, or you wouldn't say it."

"Have it your own way," said her nephew coolly.

On hearing this, Miss Dorcas left the room.

Meanwhile, Kizzy's weak but affectionate mother was crying over her darling, and was almost insisting on feeding her as if she had been a child.

Kizzy wanted to talk to her, but somehow an uncontrollable silence was upon her. This may have been because she had such a horror of saying what might not be understood; and one sad subject occupying her mind completely, she could not make conversation upon another.

At last she asked with an effort what aunt Dorcas was talking about.

"Your father is angry with her; she has joined the Church of England, and has been getting herself talked about. Your father says it's because the young curate asked her." Then leaving the subject, Mrs. Rimmon said, "Your father is angry with Jubal too. He's taken to signing himself J. Rimmon, again; and when his father complained, he wrote back that if his father wanted obedience in great things, he might as well lay a little stress upon small things. Your cousin Thomas read the letter, and he laughed till he shook. It made your father quite unwell, and I had such a night with him after."

"What is father going to do about Jubal?" asked Kizzy, really interested now.

"He says he shall be put to work at once, at prospecting; and Jubal says he doesn't care how soon he does go. I can't think what has come over Jubal; he used to be mild enough."

"A great deal too mild," said his sister. "But when does he leave?"

"Well, there's a quarter's notice been given for him."

"I wish father would put him with uncle David," remarked Kizzy, thoughtfully. "I believe Jubal would have preferred that."

"That would be a reason for your father's not letting him go. But how tired you look, my child. Really you ought to go straight to bed."

"Oh, I am all right," replied Keziah. "You mustn't notice my looks." She tried hard to brighten up, and began to tell of her arrangements with Miss Harwyn.

"I wish you had been going back to Mrs. Beredith," her mother said, when she had heard all.

"But I couldn't," said Kizzy wearily.

As she said this, the hall door was slammed. It was Dorcas taking her leave. Kizzy rose, and was about to quit the kitchen, when her cousin

stood before her. He had formed a new resolution. Was it not as well to cage his bird, if possible? Was not every moment of delay a danger when a woman was so handsome?

"Cousin," he began, "would you give me a few moments' conversation with you?"

"Very well;" and she sat down again.

"Not here," said Hackbit persuasively. "Won't you come into the dining-room? There's no one there now."

She obeyed, as if doing a penance, and went with him to the dining-room.

"Do not be angry with me," said the lawyer, closing the door.

"Why should I be angry?" replied the girl wearily.

"But if anything I say to you should appear to be sufficient cause?"

Kizzy looked frightened. She thought he was going to speak of her lover.

"I mean well by you, Kizzy—indeed I do," he began.

"Then don't mention his name to me," entreated Kizzy, turning her head away.

He stood silent for a few moments. No one would have guessed from the repose of his attitude what a battle was raging within him. It was one of those moments in his life when good and evil were fighting for possession of him. He had really grown to have a mad passion for this girl, for her rare beauty, her alternately caressing and passionate ways; but now, as he looked at her and thought of the utter guilelessness of her heart, he felt something like a criminal in seeking to join her lot with his. Truly he was within a hairbreadth of telling this girl that the letter she had received was a forgery. If he did this, he would win her regard for ever; but it would be renouncing her, and this thought was maddening at the moment. Would that shapely head with its shining black curls never rest upon his breast? He must possess her. He would give up drinking. He would be the best husband upon earth to her.

"Kizzy," he broke out, "you don't know how much I love you. I know I ought not to speak about it; you are so far above me. But then, Kizzy, you will make me better than I am."

"Don't say any more," cried Kizzy piteously; "I can't bear it."

"At least hear me," pleaded her cousin. "That commits you to nothing. You know the worst of me, cousin." (How far that was from being true!) "You have known me all my life. Have you ever known me say what I didn't mean?"

"I have always thought there was plenty of good in you," replied the girl in a low voice.

"Then you will listen to me?"

Kizzy remained silent. She had become used to bearing.

"I can offer you a good home, and everything you can wish for. I would adopt that baby—I would, indeed. And you are not strong enough now to face the world. How could you provide for the baby? You are very independent, Kizzy. Think how much better it would be for you to have a home of your own by right. And you so like being kind to people. Think how much more you could do with a house of your own and money of your own. What should you do if your health failed you? Should you come home to your father?"

"I could die," replied the girl doggedly.

"You might want to; but people who want to die never do; and who would care for the baby if you did?"

Kizzy looked up with a wan smile, like the wraith of her old merriment. "Haven't you just said you would adopt the baby?"

"With its foster-mother—not otherwise. But, dearest Kizzy, don't give me an answer now; only tell me may I ask you again. At least you can grant me that, Kizzy. I have been silent so long for your sake. Tell me I may speak to you again, after a long time—as long as you like."

"It would be of no use at all," she said. "You may if you like, but it would be of no use." She had suffered so herself, it hurt her now to inflict pain on him.

"Bless you for that," said her cousin.

"Say no more about it," replied Kizzy desperately. "You are in love with a dead one."

Nevertheless he left her with a kind of hope; and his first inclination was to get a stiff glass of brandy and drink her health, but he stopped himself. "No, I will not drink another drop till I know she won't have me."

The following day Keziah faced a new difficulty. She had no money, and she must have new clothes before going to Miss Harwyn. She would not ask her father for a penny, she had such terrible fears as to how he came by his money. She confided her trouble to Sarah. She knew it was of no use to tell her mother.

Sarah immediately offered her little savings; but this Kizzy absolutely refused to accept, unless neither of them could think of another plan.

"Have you thought of asking your uncle David, Miss Kizzy?" Sarah suggested.

This was the very idea. Keziah at once sat down and wrote:—

“MY DEAR UNCLE,—I am sure you would like to do me a kindness. I am going to Miss Harwyn as companion, but my clothes are rather shabby, and I am very unwilling to go without some new ones. Very few would suffice. I should be so glad if you would lend me a little money. You will understand I do not like to ask my father for money. But if you send me some, do me the further kindness—and this will be the greater in my eyes—of not refusing to let me repay it when I get my first money. In justice to father, I ought to say that he offered me some money this morning. Do not blame me, dear uncle ; I could not take it.

“I am so glad to think of living near you and dear old grandmother. I shall come as soon as I can get my clothes made, for I know you will send the money ; so, thanking you in advance, and with my best love to you and grandmother, I am, your loving niece,

“KEZIAH.”

Two days later came the answer. It ran as follows :—

“MY DEAR NIECE,—I am proud to be of service to you, now and always. If the ten-pound note enclosed is not sufficient, let me know. Count me as your debtor to any amount.

“And now, my dear niece, let me tell you what I think about this. It is very hard for those people who have all the will to give, and have nothing to give. But it is harder still for those who, having plenty of money, have no one who cares for them enough to accept anything from them. Let this speak to you, and I don't think you will be hard-hearted enough to return me the money. In my heart and house there is a home for you whenever you will take it ; and for Jubal too. How happy I should be if you lived with me. But it will be something to have you next door. Miss Harwyn is such a sweet young lady, you will be happy with her.

“I have known what it is to be poor, my Kizzy, and to long for the things displayed in the Jumley shop windows ; and now I look at the Manchester shop windows with gold in my pockets ; but what is the use of my buying the pretty things, with no one to give them to ? I have never tried you since you were a little one ; but that's my cowardly way. But your letter has encouraged me, and if you would let me buy a little thing that takes my fancy, and give it to you, and not mind if it turns out of no use, you will give me a great pleasure. Your confidence in me has made me so happy, I beg you will never return me the money.

"Your grandmother is much better, and sends her love to you.

"I am, always, your true friend and affectionate uncle,

"DAVID RIMMON."

Kizzy was crying before she had got through this letter. It was not her way to cry ; but her trouble had weakened her, and his kindness touched her so deeply. She ended by carrying her ten-pound note in triumph to the kitchen.

Mr. Rimmon, to do him justice, had tried to make himself agreeable to his daughter since she had come home. His vile conspiracy against his daughter was an appalling load upon his mind, and he vainly thought to atone by extra kindness—kindness due to a daughter as her right under ordinary conditions.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE REV. BROUGHAM BANNER.

THE curate of St. Margaret's, already several times alluded to, was no small star in the murky Jumley horizon. To increase his lustre, he made use of an immoderate number of candles, in defiance of the feelings of the majority of Jumleyites. Was it not in Jumley that the famous John Wesley preached one of his most remarkable sermons? and was it not in Jumley that one of the earliest Methodist chapels had been erected?

It is probable that these facts were known to the clergyman, for he used to say, in his grandest manner, that in Jumley he felt he was routing the enemy in his stronghold. His knowledge, however, was due to a cause carefully kept in the background ; he had been brought up a Methodist, and had himself sought to enter the Wesleyan ministry ; but failing to pass the required examinations, he had found refuge in the Church of England, whose arms have so frequently opened to receive the rejected of other denominations.

The rector of St. Margaret's was well stricken in years, and troubled himself very little as to his curate's line of conduct, so long as the congregations kept up. There could be no doubt that this condition was fulfilled under the Rev. Brougham Banner's ministry, but as to the reasons for this we had better not inquire too closely. Curiosity was one strong stimulant. Mr. Rimmon's depreciation of the curate's sermons was very justifiable ; for most of his hearers owned that they had nothing

in them. They were not likely to have much in them, for Mr. Banner wrote them himself, notwithstanding Mr. Rimmon's assertion to the contrary. But the curate trusted, not without reason, in the strength of a sepulchral voice, united to a highly attractive musical service. Certain voices in particular, hired at some cost, produced a striking effect in the solos, which were liberally scattered. One magnificent bass would have led the soul heavenward by the richness and pathos of his singing, but that his face was considerably bloated, and irresistibly led one's thoughts to those palaces of devotion to drink, where the complexion is painted for a man at a small cost per day. Surely this is an argument in favour of invisible choirs.

Under the new *régime*, the altar cloth had assumed a magnificence hitherto unheard of in Jumley. A cross of wonderful workmanship, before which a number of candles burned, was placed above the altar. But while the Rev. Brougham saw to it that the Sunday and early daily services should be impressive, he considered that his strength lay in his visiting every house in his parish, and constituting himself the spiritual adviser, to use no harsher term, of as many as would be led. In other cases, where a certain intelligence of countenance, together with a look of determination, warded off every effort of his in this direction, he would make himself as agreeable as possible, and as inoffensive. So it happened that on some terms or other he had access to most houses. He was vaguely informed on many subjects; and surface information, discreetly used, goes a long way towards deceiving people into belief in profundity of knowledge. It followed that he could talk with everybody; and whenever he felt himself on the border of a fog, he brought to the fore his listening faculty, in which he was unsurpassable. On the whole it will be seen that this gentleman was an inexpressible loss to the Church of Rome, in which his faculties would have had fuller play.

On the morning after Miss Dorcas Rimmon's conversation with her brother, on Church *versus* Dissent, Miss Timmins and Miss Burgess, two of her assistants, were engaged in displaying some new triumphs of millinery art in the window of Miss Dorcas' shop, which was situated in the High Street of Jumley, and commanded a larger proportion of the pavement than any other shop in the street. The goods displayed in the windows were showy, in the height of fashion, and very expensive. Miss Rimmon used to boast that every article was marked in plain figures, and that nothing could induce her to take off a halfpenny. But then the articles she sold were invariably good, and the work was

irreproachable. It was well known that Miss Rimmon had a comfortable balance at her banker's, besides investments, which made her, so to speak, independent of customers. Miss Rimmon had had little to begin with; but if she had had sixpence a week to live upon, she would doubtless have saved fivepence halfpenny out of it. Her apprentices of course, paid dearly for the privilege of being under her; and they were ill-fed when they lived in the house, hard-worked in any case, and always snubbed. Still, she understood her business well, and it was a great recommendation to any girl to have been trained under Miss Rimmon.

While Miss Timmins and Miss Burgess were displaying the bonnets in the window, who should pass but the Rev. Brougham Banner. He paused a moment, and appeared to consider something, then entered into the shop. He touched his broad-brimmed hat as he entered, and greeted the young ladies with a grave, pastoral "Good-morning," made some common-place remarks about the weather, and produced some tracts.

"We have little time for reading," remarked Miss Timmins.

"We must not neglect our sacred duties for the profitless works of the world," urged the clergyman. "Eternal truth lives, while bonnets pass away."

"That may be true," returned Miss Timmins, rather sharply. "But we are in the world, and we must live; and for that we must work early and late."

"Yes," added Miss Burgess; "early and late, and for bread."

"The bread of heaven is without money and without price," rejoined the curate, in his most parsonic tone.

"It's all very well, sir," replied Miss Timmins, "for clergymen like you, to talk in that way. Your money is sure, and you can afford to give time to those things. But we poor girls must be practical or starve."

"On the Sabbath day at any rate, you can read these tracts," answered the curate. "Then you are released from the toils which beset the week and may look to your spiritual state. I wish I could see you at the morning service, both of you."

"Well sir," said Miss Burgess, "we work till twelve o'clock on Saturday night, and most other nights, and we like to rest a bit on Sunday morning. It's the only rest we get for the week."

"Do you not think there is a danger," went on the clergyman, in an ominous tone, "of your Saturday night's work going on into the sacred Sabbath?"

"We always leave off at twelve," replied Miss Timmins.

"But your clock may be wrong," suggested Mr. Banner.

"Well, sir, we can't help it," said the girl.

The conversation was interrupted by the appearance of a head at the glass door separating an inner room from the shop. The head was crowned with copper-coloured hair. The girls instantly went about their work ; and Miss Rimmon, with a face beaming, entered the shop, and held out a skinny hand to the curate.

"How d'e do, Miss Rimmon?" said that gentleman.

"Well, Mr. Banner. I've been very busy of late, there's been so much mourning to make since the explosion ; and Jumley folks always have their mourning made by me, and of course that means a great deal of work for me personally, for it's very little help these chits of girls are to anybody—they want so much showing."

"Ah, it was a sad thing that explosion," observed the curate. "I was on the pit bank soon after, and my blood ran cold at the awful profanity that came from the mouths of the women, brought there face to face with God's judgments. You will scarcely believe it, Miss Rimmon, but some of those women actually swore at me, a minister of the Church."

Miss Dorcas held up both her hands in horror.

"Yes, they actually did ; and they threatened me, too." He was inwardly thinking, too, of a certain practical joke that had been played upon him, in spite of his cloth ; but he avoided any reference to the topic. "I have tried to serve my flock in my poor way," he went on.

"No one knows that better than I do," said Miss Dorcas sweetly. "But won't you come into my little parlour and sit down?—so many people come in and out of the shop."

"I suppose you have a large custom?"

"I have nothing to complain of."

"But much to be thankful for," added Mr. Banner.

"And I trust I am thankful."

"I hope," said the curate, plunging again into conversation when seated in the sitting-room, "that you have been trying to do something to induce your brother to come to church. His influence is so great in Jumley, I know many others would follow in his train."

"I fear it's of no use trying," replied Miss Rimmon with a gentle smile ; "he's so obstinate."

"Have you tried to do anything with your nephew, Mr. Hackbit? I am sure he lives near enough to attend my services ; and I fear very much he is in the wrong way."

"Oh, Thomas won't listen to a word I say, ever. If he knew I wanted him to do anything, he would do just the opposite, to spite me."

"I can hardly understand anyone wanting to spite you," rejoined the clergyman suavely.

The milliner simpered, and moved a little nearer the curate, who went on, "I must try what I can do with him myself."

"Oh, pray, don't," said Miss Dorcas, really alarmed. "Thomas would—I really don't know what Thomas would not do. I beg of you, don't go to him."

"If he is so far astray, the more is it my duty to show him the error of his ways."

"My advice to you is, don't go," reiterated Miss Dorcas.

"Your conversation, Miss Rimmon, reminds me of the language used to Christian by his friend when he was about to leave the City of Destruction. You have read *The Pilgrim's Progress*, have you not, Miss Rimmon?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, "and wept over it many a time."

"For my part, I find it a most encouraging book," said the curate. "You see Christian always conquered."

"Oh, I meant tears of joy," said Miss Rimmon finding she had taken a wrong tack.

"I must beg you to excuse my running away," observed Mr. Banner, looking at his watch. "Pleasure bids me stay, but duty bids me go."

Miss Rimmon smiled her sweetest. "Don't be long before you come again," she said; "I am so lonely. I have no spiritual intercourse but with you." As the clergyman rose, she stretched out both her hands to him, and he experienced some difficulty in liberating his own, so firm was the grip of Miss Dorcas. As he passed into the street she looked lovingly after him. He, poor youth, was thinking how her left forefinger had scratched him, being positively like a nutmeg grater with so much sewing; and with that she passed completely out of his thoughts.

At the corner of the street Mr. Banner stumbled against Thomas Hackbit. Here was a golden opportunity for the parson.

"Good morning, Mr. Hackbit," he began, in his most priestly tone.

"Mornin'," said Hackbit, and was about to pass on.

"My dear sir," said the clergyman, "do give me a few moments' conversation with you."

"Well, I'm in a deuced hurry," rejoined Hackbit, taking out his watch. "What do you want with me?"

The reverend gentleman was somewhat puzzled how to reply, having had no time to prepare for the attack ; so he stood silent.

"Want to borrow some money, I suppose," said Hackbit, helping him out. "You parsons are good at getting into debt, I know."

The clergyman turned very red. "You are wrong, Mr. Hackbit," he replied coldly. "It was in your interest, not in mine, that I stopped you."

"I am quite capable of taking care of myself," retorted the lawyer, "and don't want anybody meddling in my affairs."

"In a worldly sense, Mr. Hackbit, you may be right," replied the curate, very ill at ease ; "but in looking to the temporal, I fear you forget the eternal."

'Eternal fiddlesticks,' broke out Hackbit ; "if that's all you stopped me for, I'll say good morning."

"But I beg of you to listen to a word or two more," said Mr. Banner, furtively gazing at his companion, on whose face he perceived a cynical smile.

"Well, be quick about it, for I'm in a hurry," said Hackbit, again consulting his watch.

"You can't think how much I admired the valiant way you went down the pit that night of the explosion."

"You did not follow my example, however," retorted Hackbit.

"The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak," answered the clergyman.

"Yes, you don't look very strong."

"Physically, I am not."

"Well, there's one thing—you've an easy enough life of it ; you're not killed with work."

"My dear friend," replied the clergyman, "you can scarcely realise my work. Even now I am about my Master's business in saying these few words to you."

"Then I think you bungle a good deal."

"But I was about to observe," went on the curate, "that when I saw you descend that coal mine, I thought to myself, 'There's energy and daring which, if turned into a right channel, might be the means of saving many souls.'"

"It wasn't in a wrong channel in saving bodies, at any rate."

"I do not pretend to say that it was."

"Look here," said Hackbit decisively ; "if you want to talk this kind of rubbish, go and talk to my aunt Dorcas ; she's fool enough to listen to

you. If you want a theological argument, go up to my uncle Joshua ; and if you want a small loan, you can come to me. I am an agent for a first-rate firm—money without security. So, good morning.” And with this, Mr. Hackbit turned and walked rapidly away, leaving the discomfited clergyman gazing after his retreating figure.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MONSIEUR PELBOIS.

THE principal inn in Langton was known by the title of the “Bull’s Head,” and thither a goodly number of Langtonians gathered to spend convivial evenings, and drink home-brewed ale out of shining pewter-pots in a large stone-floored kitchen, where a fire of enormous dimensions burned in cheerful welcome.

A few evenings after what we have just narrated, this kitchen held its usual number of boon companions, each having his pipe and his pewter-pot, and his own allotted place around the fire. Some of the company could boast of having sat in the same place twenty years, a fact which added not a little to their sense of dignity.

The man of all the company who had been longest there, and who was by far the most cantankerous of the party, was the sexton, Jody Waddy. This individual had the only arm-chair allotted to him. This in itself invested him with a kind of superiority ; and it was well known that his humour gave the tone to the meeting. If he were grave, the whole party became grave ; if, on the other hand, his spirits were high, the spirits of the entire assemblage rose in consequence.

On the evening of which we are writing, Jody’s spirits were low, and consequently a general moroseness reigned, and the smoking went on in grumpy silence. The advent of a stranger at such a time could scarcely be welcome ; but a stranger did arrive, in an extraordinary kind of dark cloak and slouch hat, which but partially hid a powerful, swarthy, foreign face.

A light snow had fallen, and this stranger’s cloak was covered with it ; and he flung it from him as he entered the kitchen. By the merest chance it besprinkled Jody Waddy, at which that gentleman took mortal offence.

“Mind what yer a-doin’ of,” he called out, in a cantankerous tone of voice.

"Pardon," said the stranger, in a supercilious tone.

"Pardon!" said Jody; "pardon, indeed; it's an article you're in want of, I guess."

The stranger, in answer, indicated his desire to have a place by the fireside, and called for coffee and brandy. No one else in the company had spoken.

"*Diable*," cried the stranger. "What's the matter with you all?"

"Matter?" said a carpenter, who was nearest the stranger. "There's darned matter enough, I suppose, to have a darned furriner coming in interrupting good company."

The stranger shrugged his shoulders, and with a light laugh said—

"Your nation is not famous for its politeness; O perfide Albion!"

"If you want to swear," said Jody, "swear in English."

"My good friend," replied the foreigner, "swearing is more in your line, I fancy."

The company looked at one another.

"No wonder you swear, my friends. What a climate! What a climate!" and he shuddered.

"Climate!" said Jody; "it's as good as yours, any way."

"Were you ever in France, my friend?" inquired the stranger, stretching his long legs out towards the blaze.

"No; and never mean to go, that's more," said Jody.

"They'd give us nothing but frogs to eat," said the carpenter, who sat next to him.

"The frog is a very good animal to eat," remarked the stranger. "You in England eat the insides of pigs and other dirty animals with a British relish, all stewed up with a distinct flavour of onions. *Oh, ciel*, what a taste these English have! You haven't got such a thing as a theatre in this place, I suppose?" he went on. "I was never here before."

"Theatre!" responded Jody. "Nothing so low. We've got penny readings."

"Penny what?" said the stranger, raising his swarthy face with an incredulous look.

"Penny readings. Are you deaf?" shouted Jody.

"My hearing is pretty good, thank you. I suppose you allude to a newspaper."

"No, we don't," put in the carpenter. "They are readings up at the Church school, of a Wednesday evening. The parson, and ladies, and gentlemen read and recite."

"Parson!" said the foreigner, with a sneer.

"Yes, parson," said Jody, nodding his head viciously. "None of your darned priests, and Jesuits, and sichlike."

"I don't waste much affection upon priests," observed the stranger, with a chuckle.

"You don't look as if you'd got any affection for anything," said Jody. The foreigner laughed an appreciative laugh.

"What sort of people have you living in the neighbourhood?" he asked. "Anybody of consequence?"

"No one particular," replied Jody, "unless lying in the churchyard."

"I do not refer to the dead," said the stranger, with a little grimace.

"I am not going to have the dead run down," said Jody.

"I have not 'run down' the dead, as you call it."

"You'd better not," was Jody's response. "We are not going to have darned furriners runnin' down the dead."

"I don't quite understand your expression, my friend. I have heard of running down hill. Perhaps you are doing that."

Jody, who was very much at a loss, reiterated his former remark with increased vigour, causing the girl who was at that moment bringing in the coffee, together with a portion of brandy in a glass, to put on a broad grin.

The gentleman for whom this beverage was intended took it from the waiter in a lordly fashion, and asked the girl in a careless way if anyone called Towers lived in the neighbourhood.

"Dr. Towers, do you mean, sir?" said the girl.

"*Certainement*, the doctor Towers," replied the stranger.

"Yes, he does live in the neighbourhood, sir, at the corner house at the top of the High Street."

"Can any of you indicate to me which is the High Street?" asked the stranger of the company generally.

Jody replied that he was going that way soon. "If the furriner would be quick and drink up that wash of his, I'd show him. But," he added in an incredulous tone, "I don't believe the doctor wants any darned furriners."

"Perhaps not," said the stranger, again laughing, and pouring his brandy into his coffee and drinking half of it at a single gulp.

The girl had been putting some coals on the fire, and was about to leave the room, when the stranger said—

"I shall want a bed here to-night, my girl. I suppose I can have one?"

"Yes, sir," answered the maid.

The foreigner put on his cloak, took up a strange-looking bag he had brought with him, and sallied forth into the winter night, with the odd little figure of the sexton beside him. They had not proceeded far when the foreigner struck against a projecting flight of steps, and, floundering out of their way, stumbled into a rut in the road.

"*Diable!*" he ejaculated fiercely. "Is there no man in the neighbourhood to whom it is the duty to see roads kept in repair?"

"The road's quite good enough for darned furriners," said Jody. "It's that brandy you've been drinking."

"You're in a quarrelsome frame of mind, my friend," replied the stranger.

Jody answered by a grunt.

"Has your Dr. Towers a good practice?"

"Yes, he has," said Jody sharply. "What have you got up with yec as you want him."

"There is nothing the matter with me, my friend."

Jody stopped short, and putting his hands upon his hips, projected his chin, and looked very fierce indeed, except that it was too dark for him to be seen.

"What do yer keep on calling me yer friend for? I ain't any friend of darned furriners."

"*Eh, bien!*" said his companion, shrugging his shoulders. "Do me the little kindness of indicating the doctor's house to me, and I will rid you of my unwelcome company." And the two marched forward.

They were not long in gaining the doctor's house. A sickly light burned in one of the small windows Mr. Saltring had complained of.

"That's Doctor Towers's," said Jody.

"*Oh, mon Dieu,*" said his companion, "it is not a palace that my friend the doctor lives in."

"Furrin doctors don't live in palaces, they live in pigsties," said Jody indignantly.

"In that little matter you are mistaken, my friend."

"Oh Lord, I wish I hadn't showed you the way at all," said Jody. "You die here, and I'll bury you a foot deep i' water. That I do promise you."

"I thank you, and have the honour to wish you good evening," said the stranger, passing in at the small gate, and leaving the sexton to go where he pleased.

The foreign gentleman knocked at the door. It was opened immediately by a servant girl.

"Is the Doctor Towers visible?" the stranger asked.

"No, sir," said the girl; "he's out at present."

"Is Ma'em'selle his amiable sister within? Yes? Then I pray you to present her my card."

"Will you step into the surgery, sir?" said the girl.

"*Mais*, certainly," said the Frenchman; and he entered the small room, packed with drugs, and smelling of them almost to suffocation; so at any rate the foreigner thought, for he made dreadful grimaces, and took out of his bag a flask of eau-de-Cologne, and poured some of the contents upon his handkerchief.

The girl was so long before returning that monsieur was compelled to divert himself by turning over the leaves of a work on anatomy which lay on the table. And the walls of the room being very thin, he was distinctly heard to utter such exclamations as "*Degoutant*," "*Bête*."

At last the servant returned, with a request that he would come into the sitting-room, which he did with the greatest alacrity. He found but one person there when he entered. It was Miss Amy.

The visitor bowed profoundly. She advanced to meet him, but spoke no word. He spoke for her, in the most amiable manner.

"Do I see Ma'em'selle well?" he said sweetly. "Nay, do not refuse your hand. It is long since I touched it."

"Oh, do not waste time in mock civilities, Monsieur Pelbois," said Miss Towers, her face very white.

"*Bon*," said M. Pelbois. "That is as you like. My amiable brother-in-law is from home. How long will it be before he returns?"

"That need not trouble you, Monsieur Pelbois," said Miss Amy. "Tell me your business, and pray be as brief as possible."

"*Comme vous voulez*," he answered, with perfect good humour. "Then perhaps you will tell me if you have seen my amiable wife, who is separated from me since a long time."

Amy turned paler. "How should it matter to you where my sister is?" she replied.

"Matter to me!" he said, with a cynical smile creeping over his face, and fixing itself. "Is it remarkable, then, that I should wish to know where is my wife?"

"Surely you can leave her in peace," said Amy. "You took no care to keep her while you had her. Why need you disturb her now?"

"Then you have seen her," he replied. "And she is in the house, *n'est-ce pas ?*"

"She is in the house, but you shall not see her," said Amy, stoutly.

Monsieur Pelbois laughed. "What a farce," he said. "I will explain myself, I think. I mean to take my wife away with me. She may be useful to me now. My profession at present is that of a conjurer, a prestidigitateur, and I have quarrelled with my musician; and I did bethink me of my amiable wife, who has a talent that way, and would render me that help."

"Will you tell me this one thing?" said Amy. "What have you done with the property in Nebraska?"

Monsieur Pelbois bowed and smiled. "Done with the property in Nebraska, Ma'em'selle? I have done nothing with the property in Nebraska."

"Have you sold the farm?"

"Well, no, I have not sold the farm," he answered. "Circumstances over which I had no control precipitated my departure."

"And you left that property; ran away from it?" said Amy.

The gentleman bowed, still smiling.

"My poor sister's property!"

"Your amiable sister deserted it first."

"What do you suppose has become of it?"

"I regret that I cannot inform you, I have not been in communication with the place since I took my *congé*."

"Whatever had you been doing, I wonder?" said Miss Amy.

"That was of a personal nature, and I fear, would not interest you," said her brother-in-law, still smiling.

"Pray tell me how long it is since you left Nebraska?"

"Nearly a year."

"And since that time?"

"Since that time I have revisited my native land. *Ah, la belle France!* I had not seen her for twenty years."

During all this time they had both been standing; but at this point Amy thought it well to ask the visitor to sit down and await her brother's advent. This question of the property perplexed her sorely. "Perhaps you will take some coffee?" she asked him.

"I thank you, I have already partaken of refreshment at the 'Boo! Head,' where also a bed awaits me. You see," he added, "I did not look for hospitality here; you never could appreciate me."

Amy made no reply to this, but looked anxiously towards the door and listened, longing for her brother to come.

He did come, and so far relieved her of anxiety ; but he went first into the surgery.

"It is long since I had the pleasure to hear the sound of that foot-step," said Monsieur Pelbois.

Amy left him without an apology, and went to the surgery. "Robert," she said, nervously, touching him on the arm, "Eugène has come."

"Eugène ! Then he's not dead."

"I never once thought him dead," said Amy. "And he wants Louisa to go with him and play music in public at wretched conjuring performances. And he has left poor Louisa's property without a soul to look to it ; and it was all a lie about his brother living there. Oh, I wish we had gone out at once when we heard the first tidings, and seen about it. And now strangers have got it, no doubt. How ever shall we get rid of him ?"

"He has not seen Louisa, has he ?" asked the doctor, huskily.

"Not yet," said Amy. "But how am I to help it if he will see her ?"

Dr. Towers passed her without an answer, and in a moment was face to face with his brother-in-law.

"*A la bonne heure !*" exclaimed that gentleman.

"How dare you come here ?" was the doctor's reply.

"What have I to be afraid of in coming ? Tell me that. I am come to claim my own property. You can make no objection, is it not ?"

"If you allude to my sister under that title, I have only one answer for you. You shall not see her."

"*Mais* they are *drôles*, these English. But there is law to be had, even in England. The law will give me my wife."

"The same law will put you in prison," was the answer.

"I quite agree with you, if the law knew a reason," replied Monsieur Pelbois. "But neither the law nor you are in that position, precisely."

Now, Doctor Towers, who was perfectly sure there was plenty of reason, was not in possession of any proof whatever ; but he answered desperately, "Do your worst. Try if you can get her from me."

"I thank you for your good advice," replied his brother-in-law. "I will not fail to follow it, except on one condition. I have already explained to Mademoiselle your sister the purpose I have in wishing for

the companionship of my wife. I desire her in the capacity of a musician. In other respects I have no desire at all for her. Her temper was not that of an angel. There were other things, too, which I will not now comment upon. But my musician at my performances cost me a certain sum. I am a conjurer by profession at this time, as I have already explained to Ma'em'selle your sister. I have travelled through many towns. Sometimes I made much money. In other places, to the contrary, I did not make enough to pay for my hall and my posters. It is needless to say that I left these places in the night time, and did not pay for my hall nor for my posters. But this did not make up for my loss of time. So I have not now much money. If you will forward to me, at an address I will give you, a sum which shall cover the cost of the musician I shall hire, I will not trouble Madame my wife."

Dr. Towers listened in gloomy silence to this recital, and at the end of it he cast an almost hunted look around the room, so meagre and destitute of comforts. "Heavens!" he exclaimed, "how are we to live if I am to have another drain upon me?"

The foreigner laughed. "So the noble Herr still troubles you for a little cash occasionally, does he?" he said. "You see, the English, the always ever-innocent English, have occasionally their little secrets which must be kept in the dark."

"For God's sake, don't say any more, Pelbois," said Towers, flashing a look at him.

"You have a good practice, too," went on Monsieur Pelbois. "A most peculiar and eccentric old man told me so, who likewise accompanied me to your door, and whose pleasure it was to call me 'darned foreigner' every time he made occasion to speak to me."

"Listen a moment, Pelbois," said Towers. "You must get away from this place as soon as possible; and, pray, do not mention your name."

"I must rest this one night at the 'Bool's Head;' and perhaps you will give me a little ready money to pay my hotel?"

The doctor plunged his hands into his trousers pockets, and brought out some gold, a little silver, and a few pence, and flinging it in a despairing way upon the table, said, "Who would believe in Langton, that I am penniless this night?"

CHAPTER XIX.

DISAPPOINTED HOPES.

KIZZY found her new home like a fairy paradise. At Mrs. Beredith's she had known luxury, but here it was combined with the presence of an original mind and with a person of artistic taste.

The hour of their arrival had been known to their neighbours, and David Rimmon, with his heart beating fast, was on the look-out for them. He opened the door himself as soon as they knocked. His first inclination appeared to be to speak to Maud before his niece; but he checked himself, and kissed Kizzy. That acute young person could not help noticing how his hand trembled. David seemed to lose all power of taking the lead in his own house; and Maud, with the easiest, frankest manner, led the way to the sitting-room.

"Your grandmother is not gone to bed, Kizzy," said her uncle; "and she is so longing to see you." And there, sure enough, was the old lady, almost hidden in a very high-backed chair.

Kizzy kissed her affectionately. With trembling lips the grandmother tried to say something, but gave up the attempt.

"What a beautiful dress you've got on, grandmother," said the girl, looking at her admiringly.

"Do you think it looks well, Kizzy?" said the old lady, finding her voice. Then she added in a low tone, "How long is it since I have had a new dress?"

"Never mind about that, grandmother."

"I'm quite in the shade now," put in Miss Harwyn, in a whimsical manner. "Before you came, Kizzy, Mrs. Rimmon made much of me; but she hasn't even spoken to me now."

In truth, the old lady had not seen her; and now that she heard her voice, she called to her piteously. Maud kissed her on both cheeks, and then they all sat down, and the old lady roused up, and seemed inclined to talk.

"The servants are so wasteful here, Kizzy," she said. "They throw away the tea-leaves, and they always have milk in their tea; and they let the fire blaze; and they have the gas when nobody's reading or sewing; and they have meat for supper."

"Never mind, if uncle likes it, grandmother."

"But there's something else I want to tell you, Kizzy. Your uncle

won't let me go into the kitchen, and he won't let me speak about things to them, and everything's going to ruin. The servants take no more notice of me than if I was a chair, they don't. And I'm not so deaf as I was; and I heard them call me a cross old stick. I'm so glad you've come, Kizzy."

David had gone out of the room for a moment; but he heard the last part of the conversation, and said almost impatiently—

"She'll never rest in this world, now, Kizzy, not now she's got the chance. To hear her talk you'd think I was ever such a screw. My opinion can't move her. She won't end her days comfortably. And—and—I think there must have been some truth in what Joshua said." There was disappointment in his voice as he spoke.

"Don't be disheartened, Mr Rimmon," said Maud. "It is hard for people to change at her time of life."

"I know that," said David ruefully. "I got her that dress from Manchester, and she wouldn't put it on till to-day. She sewed it up in a towel."

Poor David! He had imagined in taking his mother away from Jumley, that it would be quite a simple matter to make her happy, seeing that he could give her all that money could purchase. It was to be the "happy ever after" of the fairy tales. He did not know that those who have suffered until they are on the verge of the grave have not the power to be happy, be their circumstances ever so changed. Was ever a prisoner released from the Bastille, known to rejoice and blossom after twenty years' captivity?

Mrs. Rimmon positively suffered in being surrounded by so many comforts; and, as ever, the workhouse stared her in the face. To what other end could such extravagance lead?

Keziah noticed that her grandmother looked very weary, and begged her to go to bed.

"Oh, yes," she replied feebly, "I'll go to bed. I'll go to a narrower bed soon, and be no burden to nobody."

It was very distressing, and poor David was nearly beside himself.

"Come," said Kizzy, gently taking one of her grandmother's hands, "I will go upstairs with you."

It was with a look of abject misery that the old lady allowed herself to be led away.

"Nothing I can do makes any difference," said David, when they had gone. And he dropped his head on his hands, and groaned.

Maud was much moved ; and she laid a gentle hand on his shoulder, and said, "Don't be so miserable. Indeed, indeed, it is not your fault."

"It is only since she has been a bit better that she has got like this," said David.

"It may be better now Kizzy has come," said Maud. "We shall come in, and cheer her up when you are away. She will soon get to look at things differently."

He raised his head and looked at his fair comforter, freely, and long, and earnestly, and as innocently as he might have done at a real angel sent to cheer his dark road.

"You know, Mr. Rimmon," Maud went on, "you are quite unlike anyone I know. I don't think I quite understand you ; but I do know you are very good, and I would do anything in my power to make you happy."

"Grandmother's in bed," said Kizzy, coming into the room. "Uncle, I've thought of a plan. Empty your pockets." This was in her old imperious manner. David mechanically obeyed. The first thing he produced was a tobacco pouch.

"Oh, put that away," she said with an arch smile. "I mean show me all the money you have about you. There," she said, taking up some gold and silver ; "I'm going to take this up to grandmother. I've found out she has a little box, with a very little money in it. If we let her keep this in it, she may get to feel safe from the workhouse."

The old lady was watching the door when Kizzy returned to her, and her face lit up when her granddaughter showed her the money. "Give me the box," she cried, "and my keys are in my pocket."

Kizzy was about to unwrap the best dress, which her grandmother had insisted on her wrapping up again in the towel.

"Not that dress," she exclaimed, "but the old dress there, hanging up."

Kizzy found the key sewn up in a funny little bag. "Give it to me," said the old lady sharply.

She cut the stitches first, and then handed it to her grandmother.

When the box was unlocked, a few shillings only were inside, the savings of her late years of penury. It was with a look of inordinate satisfaction that she added the gold and silver Keziah had brought, to her little hoard ; but before she would lie down to rest, she must have the key sewn up again ; and so it was a considerable time before Keziah

returned to her uncle and Miss Harwyn, and then Maud said it was quite time they went to dinner.

And these two young girls sat down in the stately dining-room of two hundred years before, and dined in a full blaze of wax tapers.

About a week later, while they were drinking tea together, Maud said to Keziah, "Do you know, I sympathize with your Uncle David more than you would think."

"Why more than I should think?"

"Because you can't know my reason. I am to some extent in the same position as he is. He brought your grandmother, believing that his wealth and good nature would ensure her happiness. I brought you here with much the same feeling, and I have failed, quite as much as your Uncle David. No, Keziah, don't interrupt me. I am baffled, mortified, and miserable, and the worst of it is, I have nobody to blame; so I lack the only solace a person in trouble ever has, in my opinion. It's a safety valve. Don't attempt to deny it, Keziah. You are not happy with me."

Keziah turned her great eyes upon her friend, and said, in a tone devoid of the slightest hesitation, "You are disappointed, because you hoped too much. I am content, because I didn't hope anything. Hope has gone out of my life."

"I don't know what you mean, I'm sure," said Maud, pettishly.

"Well, I'll try to explain it. You have the best heart in the world, Maud; but you haven't sound judgment. Your great anxiety was to find in me a pliable being, to be petted, indulged, and ruled over by you."

"I wouldn't have believed you could say such unkind things, Keziah."

"It sounds harsh, I know, Maud; but, you see, I've been brought up so differently from you, and am not much used to glossing things over. You have all your life been mistress of a fortune, so to speak. I have had nothing but myself to be mistress of, and, being cast much on my own resources, have been a leader in my way, and have certainly not allowed myself to be led. You are a leader, too, but chiefly by right of pounds, shillings, and pence, as if somebody had bought you a commission in the army; while I, as a private soldier, have had to work my way up. Not that I have reached any great degree of eminence yet; but, in right of my own work and my own endurance, my soul refuses to be dictated to, though my reason suggests that it might be better if I sometimes were."

"Let me tell you for your good that you are terribly conceited, Keziah," said Maud, turning a little on one side.

"People usually are, who have fought their way as I have. And I will make you think me more conceited by saying that I feel myself more capable of leading you than you are of leading me. The hardest schools are the best schools after all ; and people living always at their ease on land cannot be in a position to dictate to an old sailor, at any rate on the subject of navigation."

"When have I ever tried to dictate to you?" said Maud.

"You don't precisely dictate," replied Keziah ; "but then you suggest in a way that makes it almost impossible for me to refuse without being offensive. You don't say anything, but you look a great deal. Nothing would really suit you, short of my losing my individuality in yours, and falling in with everything you suggest. And I'll throw away my individuality for nobody. In some things I allow your judgment to be better than mine. I grouped the bunch of flowers in the picture just as you wished, because you are a better painter than I am."

"If you did that," said Maud, "you said there was far too much white in that painting I did of Venice."

"That was merely an opinion," rejoined Keziah. "But what did you do after I had said so? You did not pass over the remark for what it was worth, but must needs tear up and burn a picture really worth keeping, thus adding fuel to my conceit, as you call it, by showing me I had so much power over you."

"I did it to please myself, not you," said Maud.

"You were pleased enough with the picture until I complained of there being too much white; and then, after begging me to give an honest opinion, you got so angry as to destroy it. I tell what I think : you and I each want to dictate, and not be dictated to. My soul makes the greater demands, because you have money and I have not, because you have birth and I have not. I don't know how it is, Maud, but you rouse antipathy in me, and you rouse objections."

"Oh, Keziah," said Maud, humbly, "I never could have been so mean as to wish to dictate to you."

"But you can't see how you act, Maud, as I expect I can't see how I do. Don't you think it would be wiser if we separated?"

"No, I don't," said Maud desperately. "I can't part with you, Keziah. You have taught me more, and done me more good than anything else in the world. Don't speak of going, Keziah. You shall do

just as you like. No, I will do just as you like, if that way of putting it pleases you better."

"You mean what you say," said Keziah. "And yet to-morrow morning after breakfast you will suggest some plan for the day, and it will not be enough for you that I should agree with you, as I invariably do. I must throw myself into it with avidity and delight such as your own; nothing less ever satisfies you; and your making this demand upon me makes me the less likely to respond, and irritates me."

"Don't say any more," said Maud. "I won't hear any more."

"That's only an example of what I say," said Keziah.

As the evening went on, harmony appeared to be restored, and the two girls went together to Maud's dressing-room and did their hair in company before going to bed. There had been no explanation, however, and no reconciliation; there had been merely an ignoring of what had occurred.

The next morning, when the girls were breakfasting, Keziah opened and read a letter which had come for her, and, having done so, put it into her pocket without remark.

Maud watched this action, and said nothing. But she broke the top off an egg in a very rough manner, and after tasting a spoonful of it, pushed it away. She next picked up the newspaper, which always lay upon her breakfast table, and commenced reading to herself.

Keziah watched her uneasily for a few moments, and then said, "Why don't you read the news out as usual, Maud?"

"Why should I read my news to you? You read none of yours to me."

"Do you mean to say that you are angry because I have not shown you my letter? Don't you know that is very like compelling me to read it to you whether I like or not?"

"You see all my letters."

"But did I ever ask to do so?"

"I'll never mention your letters again," replied Maud, angrily.

"I shall not reward your ill-temper by reading it to you. You would probably have seen it after I had thought over it a little."

"Say what you like, Keziah; you know what things will annoy me, and I believe you do them on purpose."

"It would be difficult to find out what wouldn't annoy you in some humours of yours. I never could have believed you had such a bad temper. It's quite clear to me we shall have to separate."

Maud this time made no comment, but sulkily read her paper; and, when she had finished, went into her studio without addressing Keziah.

Keziah, left in the room alone, walked with a firm step to the table where her own little desk lay, feeling bitterly that this small thing was her only possession in this room so full of things. She sat down on one of Maud's chairs, and felt that it was Maud's; and commenced to write a letter.

Her face was very white, but her hand did not tremble in the least. The letter was a short one. She put it into the envelope, addressed it, stamped it, and put it in her pocket. Having achieved this, she wondered what she should do next.

It occurred to her that she was here as companion to Miss Harwyn, and that it might be her duty to go into the studio, however much against the grain that might be. She decided to do so.

She found Maud painting fast and badly. Maud gave no sign as Keziah entered. Keziah went to her own little easel, and began to work patiently and carefully on a much more modest little subject.

Half-an-hour passed, and neither girl spoke.

At the end of that time Maud threw down her painting materials, and, turning full on Keziah, said—

"How long are you going to be sulky?"

"As long as it pleases you to set me the example.

"Oh, Keziah," said Maud in a much milder tone, "Why can't we go on properly?"

"Has the fault been mine, Maud?"

"No," Maud frankly allowed. "It has been mine, and mine altogether. But we must be friends to-day, for the nurse and baby will arrive, and we can't quarrel over the baby."

The mention of this baby seemed to summon Kizzy's better nature. She rushed to her friend in her old abrupt manner, flung her arms round her, and kissed her passionately. "Oh, Maud, I have been so wrong," she cried. "Do forgive me. I knew it was aggravating not to show you the letter, and yet I did it. Maud, I'm not a bit nice, how can you endure me? The letter was from my cousin, Thomas Hackbit. He proposed to me, and I have written and refused him."

"That's right, my own Kizzy," said Maud affectionately; "and I will own myself in the wrong more than you, ever so much more. I kept back the news of your lover's acquittal this morning. It was in the paper."

Keziah's face looked terribly mournful in a moment. "Oh, Maud," she said, "that can make no difference. He can never be anything to me in this world. Don't say anything to me, because you cannot understand. Some day, perhaps, I will tell you; I cannot now."

CHAPTER XX.

A SACRIFICE.

GREAT was the astonishment of Keziah the following evening, to hear her father announced. "What can it mean?" she said to Maud.

"Let him come in here, and I will go away," suggested Maud. So Mr. Rimmon was ushered into the drawing-room.

He looked a good deal agitated; and when the door was closed, spoke to his daughter in a voice that was very hollow and unnatural. There was something so strange in his manner, that Keziah stood transfixed, looking at him, and unable to speak.

"Have you no word of welcome for me, Kizzy?" said the banker uneasily.

"Oh, what is the matter, father?" said Keziah, advancing, and taking one of his cold clammy hands, which hung by his side, limp.

"Kizzy," said her father, turning away his face from her gaze, "I have come to ask you, my daughter, my own flesh and blood, to save me from ruin."

The girl pressed her hands suddenly against her eyes, as if to steady herself. "Tell me what you mean, father," she said, with a desperate effort.

"Oh, Kizzy," he began, "I have not been a good man. You know that, Kizzy. I am in the power of your cousin more than you can guess, more than words of mine could tell. He will expose me, Kizzy, he will ruin me, unless I can give him the one thing he covets, that is yourself, Kizzy."

The girl started, flung her arms into the air with a cry of pain, then cast herself, face downwards, upon a couch that was near.

The sight would have moved even her father's hard heart, had his own case been less desperate; but he had gone too far, he must now stop at nothing. He went on regardless of the pain he was inflicting.

"He got your letter in which you refused him; and he has threatened

me with instant exposure unless you change your mind. He has no character to lose. Oh, Kizzy, save your father from destruction. He will be a kind husband to you. He will give up drinking altogether for your sake. And I promise you, Kizzy, that I will mend my ways. Kizzy, it is in your power to redeem your father's soul from death. Can you say me nay?"

For a few minutes there was a dead silence. Then the girl's lithe form rose erect before him. The flashing dark eyes looked into his. The face had almost a glory upon it. She said softly to herself, "By doing this can I expiate his sin." She stretched out her hand to her father. He did not offer to touch it.

"Tell my cousin," she said in a firm voice, "that I will marry him." And then, as if she had borne all she could, she fled from the room.

Mr. Rimmon had nothing to do but take his leave. He groaned as the door closed behind him. This sacrifice of the one pure thing he possessed crowned his crimes.

Alone in her own room, Kizzy wept such tears as angels might weep to see. "Oh, Rupert, my own lost darling, this is for you. For you I shall break my heart. Surely God will let me expiate your sin by patient suffering, that in a brighter world we may yet be all in all to each other."

This idea of Keziah's, of sacrificing herself to appease God for her lover's crime, was in reality but an offshoot of the sentiment of redemption by substitution, so deeply implanted in the human heart, and lingering throughout larger areas than that of the Black Country. Who shall deny its nobility even when least intelligently applied?

Rupert Edmonton, whom we shall henceforth call by his true name of James Elworthy, was no sooner a free man than he made his way to Jumley, to seek his darling, whom he imagined to be there. For he had heard incidentally, that she had not returned to the Berediths though Mrs. Beredith had not communicated to him anything about Keziah. This made him the more anxious to see her immediately on his discharge.

He looked much older, and his nerves were shaken and unsteady. His heart beat so wildly as he rang the bell of Mr. Rimmon's house, that his head seemed to swim, and he could hardly see. He glanced at the dull windows, thinking, "Oh, if that lovely face should appear, with its crown of black ringlets, how bright it would all look." But perhaps his

darling was ill, pining away for him. How many pangs he suffered before the door was opened by Mrs. Rimmon, who asked him into the dining-room, where sat her husband, extremely ill at ease, conning over some accounts.

He turned deadly pale, at the sight of Elworthy. With an almost supernatural effort he controlled his tongue to stammer out—

"This is not right in you, Dr. Elworthy, to come here, considering all things."

Elworthy leaned upon a chair for support with one hand, and looking keenly at Mr. Rimmon, with the grave eyes gazing out of hollow depths, the result of sleeplessness and suffering, "Have I not the best right to come here," he asked, "when I am engaged to your daughter, and with your own consent?"

"That was before I knew," gasped out Mr. Rimmon. "But you cannot, Dr. Elworthy, think of holding my daughter to her promise, after you have been tried for murder."

Elworthy winced, but he said with a quiet dignity, drawing himself up to his full height, "I can take my answer from none but your daughter."

"Take this for an answer," said Mr. Rimmon, growing very irate and very desperate. "Keziah has engaged herself to her cousin. They had always been sweet on each other, and this business has cured her of her fancy for you."

"Good God!" cried Elworthy, not believing he could have heard aright. "Have the goodness to repeat what you said. Oh, woman, false, fickle woman!" he moaned. "For God's sake let me see her."

"She is away in a situation she found for herself."

"If you have any humanity in you, sir, tell me where."

"I do not choose, sir," replied Mr. Rimmon, "to have my daughter harassed by an unwelcome visit from you."

"She knows I am innocent by now. If she had loved me, she must have known it always." His late miseries had almost dazed him. He could get no more from the girl's father. He went out with a cry from his heart, "Why was I ever set at liberty! But I will see her and hear the truth from her lips. I will find out where she is."

Poor Elworthy, he did not know how many weary, weary weeks of fever and delirium were to follow that expedition.

CHAPTER XXI.

WEDDING PREPARATIONS.

THE Rev. Brougham Banner's visits to Miss Dorcas Rimmon had become more and more frequent. Things were clearly coming to a point; and Miss Dorcas was assiduously working at her wedding trousseau, some portions of which she took for the inspection of Mrs. Rimmon, Miss Timmins being deputed to carry the same.

Mrs. Rimmon ventured to ask when the wedding was to take place, to which inquiry Dorcas replied but vaguely.

"Brougham," she said, "is not certain when it will be convenient for him to make a tour. We must be married when he can be best spared. Of course, you understand, Ann, men of his high calling cannot go hither and thither when they will."

"I should think you will be married from here," suggested Mrs. Rimmon. "Don't you think Joshua ought to be told? And I suppose you would like to have Keziah for bridesmaid; but she will be married at Easter herself."

"Oh, indeed," cried Miss Dorcas. "So she's going to have Thomas. I call it disgusting, after that other affair of hers. But, of course, you think Keziah perfect. For my part I don't."

"Poor Kizzy's had trouble enough anyhow," replied Mrs. Rimmon; "and she's been a very good girl to me, though I could have wished her to be a little less hasty with her father at times. Won't you stay and see Joshua to-day? He won't be long before he's in."

"No, I shall choose my own time for telling him," rejoined the spinster. "Time enough for that when Brougham and I have fixed the day. I shall be married in green silk, and I shall wear a tulle veil and a wreath of orange blossoms. Miss Timmins and Miss Burgess are helping to make my wedding-dress now, and it looks most beautiful. When I am married, of course, I shall do no more dressmaking. Other duties will come upon me as a clergyman's wife."

"Excuse me, my dear," said Mrs. Rimmon, "but have you seen any of Mr. Banner's relations? I suppose his parents are still living."

This was an awkward question, which Miss Dorcas was quite unable to answer; but she got out of it in her own slippery way.

"I will tell you all about it another time," she said, rising to take her departure, and calling Miss Timmins from the kitchen, where she had been temporarily deposited.

Miss Dorcas heard her apprentice laughing as she went towards the kitchen, and when they were in the street she began to rate her soundly for her improper conduct. "It makes me quite ashamed of you," said Miss Rimmon. "If you go on like that, you'll never get on in business."

Miss Timmins heard all this in silence. Her mind appeared to be somewhere else. She scarcely paid the most ordinary attention.

"Miss Timmins!" cried her admonitress, "I suppose you hear that I am speaking to you; and how fast you are walking!"

Miss Timmins altered her pace.

"I have something I wish to ask you," said Miss Dorcas, with considerable dignity, "and that is, that you will keep my approaching marriage a strict secret."

Miss Timmins gave a slight laugh, which was choked at its birth.

They had not proceeded farther than the Old Park, when Miss Timmins asked whether, as they were not very busy, she might be excused for an hour or so on the following morning.

"I suppose you don't mind telling me where you want to go to," said Miss Dorcas.

"I wish to meet a friend."

"I hope that you have proper judgment in the choice of friends, and that they are respectable."

"Quite respectable."

"And how long do you wish to be away?"

"An hour or two would be enough."

"Well, you may go. But let me beg of you once more not to let anyone know of my approaching marriage."

The next morning Miss Timmins took advantage of the leave of absence accorded to her. Everything looked fresh and springlike that morning; but nothing could look more springlike and cheerful than did Miss Timmins with her ripe cheeks and dainty little white straw bonnet as she sallied forth.

But things did not go cheerfully in Miss Dorcas's millinery establishment that morning. For some reason or other she seemed very much out of temper. Miss Burgess, too, made such dreadful mistakes in her work that Miss Dorcas felt quite inclined to cry with vexation. But Miss Burgess's mistakes were not at the bottom of her ill-humour. The reason of that lay deeper. She was more aggravated than she would have chosen to tell, that Miss Timmins had asked leave to go out, and had not said where she was going. Miss Dorcas was sure of one thing

that Miss Timmins had nothing particular to tell, but had chosen to be aggravating. If this were the case she had evidently succeeded well.

At half-past one o'clock who should drop in but Mr. Hackbit—an event so unwonted that it set Miss Dorcas's heart palpitating. He saw her embarrassment, and laughed.

"Well, aunt," said her nephew, with his hat on one side, and not removing it; "how do you do?"

"I'm pretty well, thank you, Thomas, except for a little rheumatism in my right knee."

"Ah," said Mr. Hackbit, "that's to be expected at your time of life, you know."

"I was not aware that young persons usually suffered from rheumatism."

"Have you been growing backwards, then?"

"I don't know what you mean, I am sure, Thomas," replied Miss Dorcas, very red in the face; "but if you came here to insult me, you might have spared yourself the trouble."

"I didn't come here to insult you; I came to consult you."

"To consult me; oh, yes."

"But as you don't seem to want me, I'll go back again, I think; but before I go, it might interest you to know that Uncle Joshua asked me call round to tell you something."

As Hackbit had foreseen, his aunt's curiosity was too strong for her.

"As you are here, Thomas, you may as well tell me what it was you had come to tell me."

"Well, I don't care about the message I've brought, for I don't like the idea of people marrying at your time of life. And my message has to do with that."

Miss Dorcas bit her lip, deeply mortified, but still too curious to offend her nephew into going away without telling her.

"Well, Uncle Joshua thinks that you ought to have told him about this affair before. Aunt Rimmon told him. He asked me to look in and just say that the thing must be done properly, and that if you'll come up some time this evening, arrangements can be made. Uncle is going to call upon Mr. Banner to talk to him about it; and I expect he'll hear his opinion pretty freely about not having asked his leave."

"Your uncle has no right at all to interfere," broke in Miss Dorcas hotly. "It has nothing to do with him. I am old enough to act for myself."

"The deuce, you are," interjected Hackbit.

"If he goes up and sees Mr. Banner, I'll never speak to him again, never."

"But I expect he's gone. He said he should go in the dinner hour."

"Aunt Rimmon shall have the length of my tongue for telling him."

"You'd better let Aunt Rimmon alone, or you'll have me to talk to," said her nephew, with a show of anger. "Uncle Joshua leads her a life enough, I should think. To tell you the truth, I'm heartily glad someone has been fool enough to want to marry you—that is, if he'll take you straight out of Jumley; I pray heaven he will. I'd offer him fifty pounds out of my own pocket to do it. But if he runs away from you, don't you come back here."

"The Reverend Brougham Banner is not like you," retorted Miss Dorcas with warmth. "I am not surprised you don't understand him, a person of your drunken habits."

"Look here, Aunt Dorcas," said Mr. Hackbit, very impressively; "have the kindness to hold your tongue about my drunken habits. When did you see me drunk last?"

"That's of no consequence at all—none whatever."

"Oh, isn't it? Well, I think it is. It's a long time since I've been drunk, and when next you see me so, tell me of it; I give you leave."

"It won't be long first, I daresay," said his aunt. "I shall tell Keziah something about you when she comes home."

"You are welcome to say all you like. Your word has overpowering weight with it, I know."

"Well, if ever she marries you, she'll repent it."

"A moment ago, aunt, you were complaining of my uncle's interference in your case. I should like to remind you that you have nothing to do with Keziah and me."

They were in the midst of this family jar, when the Rev. Brougham Banner entered the shop with Miss Timmins on his arm, radiant and blushing.

Miss Dorcas stared at the vision in a kind of blank apathy, with strained eyes that refused even to blink.

"Good morning, Miss Rimmon," said the clergyman.

"Good morning," answered Miss Dorcas faintly, and like an echo.

"I have come to you to be congratulated," went on the clergyman. "You have always shown such a warm interest in me, that I am sure you

will give me your hearty congratulations on my great happiness, for great it is."

Mr. Hackbit looked as blank as his aunt, and extremely puzzled.

"You've no need to wait, Miss Timmins," said Miss Dorcas. "You can go inside ; you're after the time you said, though."

It was quite evident Miss Dorcas had not seen the whole truth yet, and was merely angry at perceiving that her apprentice had been in such close relations with the curate.

"Excuse me," said Mr. Banner, taking the apprentice by the hand. "Let me explain the situation. This lady is my wife, and as such will not enter your workshop again. I am willing to make any compensation in my power."

The muscles of Hackbit's face relaxed, and he burst into a violent fit of laughter. Peel after peel broke from him, and he held his sides. He could only utter such exclamations as "O Lord, it's too good ! It's too good ! O Lord, it's too good !"

He was recalled to himself by hearing the sound of a heavy fall. It was caused by his aunt, who had fainted and disappeared behind the counter.

The clergyman was the first to spring to her help, and he found her no slight burden to raise. The late Miss Timmins ran into an inner room and got some water. While this was happening, Hackbit's eyes opened wider than ever, as he beheld his uncle at the shop-door, taking in the whole scene.

"What is this, Thomas ?" said that gentleman in a sepulchral tone.

"Oh, I can't tell you," said Hackbit, trying hard not to laugh again.

"Then, perhaps, you can, sir," said Mr. Rimmon, addressing the discomfited curate, who was holding his burden as far from the floor as his strength would permit.

"Indeed, sir, I cannot," he answered. "I am quite taken by surprise myself ; I don't know what is the matter."

"Do you forget that you are talking to that lady's brother," asked Mr. Rimmon, with even more energy, "you hard-hearted Lovelace ?"

The clergyman's cheeks crimsoned. He had been recently reading *Clarissa*, and the character of Lovelace in all its hideousness was fresh in his mind.

"I insist on your explaining yourself, Mr. Rimmon. Your insinuation is most unpleasant and most unjust."

"I never met with such cool impudence," said Mr. Rimmon. "I've

just been calling on you, at your lodgings, and was told that you were out with that apprentice of my sister's."

"I would advise you to be careful how you speak of that lady," said the curate.

"Do you take upon yourself to defend her character, then?" said Mr. Rimmon.

"I should like to see the person who could dare to say anything against her character," retorted the curate, stoutly.

At this juncture, Miss Dorcas's eyes opened, and beheld her reverend supporter. "Oh, Brougham," she said tenderly, "you have opened your heart to me at last. Kiss me, Brougham."

"Really," said the clergyman, "this is too much, it is really. Please somebody take this woman. It's insupportable, disgusting, indecent; it is really. I don't understand it at all."

At the tone of his voice, rather than the words he uttered, Miss Dorcas fainted again, and was assisted to a chair. The curate, hot and indignant, confronted Mr. Rimmon.

"I shall insist on an explanation, sir," he said.

"You insist on an explanation!" retorted Mr. Rimmon. "You who have won my sister's young affections, only to cast them from you and trample them under foot."

"I—won—her—affections!" said the clergyman, with a stop between every word. "Are you mad? Or am I mad?"

"I'm not mad," said Mr. Rimmon; "and you are not. The worse for you. A preacher of the Gospel, acting the part of a common thief, and traitor, and liar."

Mr. Hackbit at this moment interrupted.

"Don't you think it's better, uncle, to enter into a few explanations before using such epithets. They're nasty in point of law, you know; ticklish. There may be some mistake."

"Mistake!" almost shrieked the curate. "Has she dared to make the mistake, that I—loved her? Has she—oh, really it is too disgusting."

"Would you mind explaining?" said Mr. Rimmon, considerably quieted down by Hackbit's interference.

"There is nothing to explain, that I am aware of," said Mr. Banner. "This lady," indicating Miss Timmins, "and I have been for some time engaged to each other; but I did not make the engagement public; for the people in this neighbourhood have a low way of talking of such matters which I strongly object to. This morning we were married, and

I brought my wife to receive Miss Rimmon's congratulations, and to make any reparation I could for having removed her before her time was really up. I decided to marry at once, because I received a better appointment at Langton, as curate to Mr. Rockingham. He is going away for some time almost immediately, and wishes me to come to Langton as soon as possible, to take his place. Further than this I can tell you nothing."

Hackbit and Rimmon looked at each other in blank amazement. At last Mr. Rimmon said, with evident effort, "I beg your pardon, sir. I see there has been some mistake."

"I think, uncle, you are taking the wisest course," said Hackbit.

"I am sure," said the clergyman, breaking in once more, "I never dreamed she thought my attentions were for her, as she seems to have done. I thought—excuse me if I say it, I mean no offence—that she took a very motherly interest in me. I cannot tell you how surprised and shocked I am."

"May I beg of you," said Mr. Rimmon, huskily, "to say nothing about this?"

Hackbit shrugged his shoulders, thinking doubtless that Miss Dorcas herself had spread the thing about enough, in spite of her pretended secrecy.

"You see," said Mr. Rimmon, "I have a position in this place, and I could not bear a story like this to get about."

"I am not likely to say anything about it," said the curate. "I can assure you it's most trying to me as a clergyman."

Dorcas at this point groaning, Mr. Banner looked round for his wife, and beckoned her to come away at once. He had no wish to encounter any more of Miss Dorcas's speeches to him; so with a curt good morning, he left the shop with his new wife; and Miss Dorcas at last came to herself.

"Where's Brougham—my dear, cruel Brougham?" she asked faintly.

"Look here," said Mr. Rimmon, glad of a new object for his wrath, which had not abated in the least. "How dare you make fools of us in this way? And at your age, too!"

"I must go about my business," said the nephew, and took his leave. His uncle sharply followed him out of the shop, determined to waste no more words upon the wretched woman who had put him to shame. His position seemed to be ebbing away. Keziah had run away, Jubal

had refused to obey him, and now here was his sister disgracing him. "I tell you the truth, Hackbit," he said to his nephew when he had overtaken him, "I never knew such a disgraceful thing in my life."

"Oh, I have," said Hackbit; "things a great deal more disgraceful. She's only playing the fool. That's more contemptible than it is disgraceful. It isn't like playing the villain." And the pair went their different roads.

In the meantime Miss Dorcas, by the help of Miss Burgess, had gained her own room, and lay, imploring her apprentice not to speak to her, though that young lady had not opened her mouth, and showed no disposition to speak to her.

Miss Burgess, who had heard most of what had occurred, and from being amused, had grown rather alarmed at the turn things had taken, began to think with a good deal of apprehension of the year still to be passed before her apprenticeship would come to an end. She foresaw, for that one moment of triumph, which she had truly enjoyed for her friend's sake, a weary payment of jarring, unkind words, plentiful discouragement, suspicion, and overwork. She knew that her friend would write to her, and that she was to visit her at Langton later on. But even this visit was beset with difficulties; and she could not help feeling that the cage door had in very truth been opened, and one bird had been freed and one had been left.

Martha Timmins and Emily Burgess had been fast friends from the hour in which Emily had come to Jumley, a disheartened and almost broken-hearted girl in deep mourning, to learn dressmaking. Kind friends had paid the necessary premium for this when she was left without a single relative. Martha had been drawn to the stranger, for she, too, was in a sense alone in the world, having only an aunt, who considered she had done great things when she apprenticed her, and on her rare visits did little but remind her of the fact. Emily had lost much strength before coming, and could sew but very slowly at first; and many a time Miss Timmins had finished her task after her own. Thus it was no wonder that Emily Burgess felt rather miserable when she saw her friend borne away from her. She was very thankful when Miss Dorcas expressed a wish to be left alone.

Dorcas Rimmon passed the next few days in indulging her mingled mortification and anger, and in self-justification. None are so deluded as the self-deluded.

CHAPTER XXII.

TOM TOWERS'S TEMPTATION.

SOME weeks had passed since the events just narrated, and a furious March wind was blowing. It was evening, and the same company of old chums that we met on a former occasion were congregated round the fire at the Bull's Head in Langton. But this time a silent mood was not upon them, for Jody had had striking news to impart. He had been walking, he said, by his "garding," the grave already referred to, not because it was haunted by sweet memories of the dead and gone, as some who did not know him might imagine, but because he liked to smoke his pipe in the open air, and his cottage door opened on the graveyard.

"It wor only last night," said Jody, "an' the wind wor blowin' fit to cut you through. It wor between eleven an' twelve, an' the clouds wor blowin' over the moon till sometimes it wor pitch dark an' sometimes quite light; an' I just walked round my garding, an' I thought I heard somebody speak nigh to th' church. So I just walked straight up to where I heard it."

One of the cronies here nudged the man next to him. Jody looked fierce. "Do you mean you don't think as I did go up to it?" said he in a loud, shrill tone.

Everybody declared that **no one** meant anything of the kind, and that they knew he would, of course, go straight up to it. Jody went on—"I couldn't see nothink," (which was probably the case, seeing that Jody had, with the rapidity of lightning, secreted himself behind a tombstone on hearing the voice). "Well, the voice it came nearer, an' I knew it quite well. It wor Dr. Towers an' his nephew, an' what words they let fall I will never breathe to anyone." This was very likely, considering he did not hear anything that he could understand. His companions, however, firmly believed that Jody was in possession of the secret of this strange family; and they looked upon him with a greatly-increased respect.

While Dr. Towers and his nephew were being thus talked of, they themselves were holding a conversation of no ordinary import. The country lane where they were walking was bounded by high hedges. The lane itself was so narrow that they were obliged to walk very near ogether. Both appeared strangely agitated.

"I see nothing before us but ruin," said the elder man, in a tragical

tone of voice, "now Pelbois has made such demands upon us, and that wretched Hermann has threatened us. Two hundred pounds! Where are we to find two hundred pounds who have not two hundred pence?"

"Uncle," replied the younger man, appealingly, "won't you let me make a clean breast of it to you?"

He was instantly silenced. "On no account," said his uncle. "When first you told me that you were in that man's power, do you remember how I begged you never to tell me why?"

"I do," replied Tom, with an effort.

"And I said I would satisfy the demands so long as you told me nothing. Don't break your word to me."

"Uncle," said the younger man, with a firm voice but ghastly countenance, "I will end this difficulty."

"For God's sake, do nothing rash, nothing wrong."

"What can wrong-doing matter, seeing you believe in no future, uncle?"

"Yet, I pray you, do not do wrong. There is a wrong and right."

"There are those that can sink no deeper," said Tom.

"I don't believe that," replied his uncle.

"You are a strange mixture of belief and unbelief."

"I am," said the doctor; and he laid his hand affectionately on his nephew's shoulder. "But there is that within me that assures me it is better for you, it is better for me, to endure martyrdom than to sink into more wrong-doing. It may be that I am on the verge of a greater belief; I know not. But I pray God to show me light; and I am sure that though our life ends with our last breath, to live well during this short span is worth having been born, however bitter may have been the schooling."

But Tom was deaf to all this now; and he had mentally resolved on a course of action. His uncle should not know of it till it should be past remedy. He must ask Maud Harwyn to marry him; he saw no other course.

Then came the difficulty—how was he to word his letter to her?—of course, it must be done by letter. He could not go to Manchester to see her, living alone as she did. But how could he commit this terrible wrong against her whom he had loved so passionately and renounced at the cost of such bitter struggles? He knew in his heart of hearts that Maud believed her money was the only thing that separated them. How bitter it was that this should become his reason for asking

her! It was as though an evil genius pursued him. The thing he most coveted was to be his, and turn to Dead Sea fruit; nay, worse, would not this loved being rise up in judgment against him? At this moment it appeared clear to his mind that a day of disclosures must come, in this world or in another. He shut his ears to the cries of his heart. Like Faust, he had summoned the Evil One, and he was not a master who would let him break his compact. He should win his Marguerite, and afterwards would come the flames. The angels, of course, would see to her safety; no real harm would come to her pure spirit. His uncle and aunts would be freed from the pressure and anxieties they now felt on his account. He must bear the penalty alone. So Faust went home and wrote to Marguerite, and Mephistopheles was at his elbow.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A FATEFUL DECISION.

WHEN Tom Towers's letter came to The Hollies, the girls were at breakfast. Having read it, Maud began to laugh.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Keziah.

"It's the drollest letter, Kizzy. It's from Tom; a proposal of marriage. As far as I can judge, he seems to have made violent efforts to say he does not care for my money, yet he has not said it. I suppose he thinks I shouldn't believe him if he did. It's so ridiculous to have money. I must say this proposal is couched in about the coolest words he ever addressed to me. I don't call it a bit affectionate. I assure you, Kizzy, that had this man not spoken to me many times in a way I could not mistake, I should take him to be a mere fortune-hunter by the letter. I shall tell him so when I write. He has often made me miserable by his eccentric ways. I will pay him back in his own coin, and reward him afterwards. I shall tell him I say 'No, sir,' to all fortune-hunters."

"But supposing he took you at your word, Maud?"

"He won't. But I think I shall insist on his getting his qualification before I marry him."

Maud, in her triumph, did write the letter she had intended; and it was a masterpiece of coldness and delicate satire, extremely unsatisfactory to the recipient, though it really contained no refusal.

The effect Maud's letter had upon Tom Towers was of the bitterest description. Shots in the dark sometimes go straight home, as if fate would laughingly demonstrate to the marksmen of this world how much better his shots are aimed than theirs. No one knowing all about Towers could possibly have wounded him more deeply.

He was just walking out to see a patient when he received the letter. He opened it in the road, with a palpitating heart. Not feeling courage to face the full revelation of Maud's mind upon the subject of his offer, if this letter should contain such a revelation, he allowed his eyes to rest upon but one line at a time, covering the rest with the envelope which had contained the letter. Having come to the last word, he was conscious of standing still in the road, feeling a total inability to move. It was clear to him that Maud had fathomed the baseness of his design upon her, and had retaliated as might have been expected. If only he had followed his impulse to speak to her at Christmas, nay even before, he could then have said truly, "It is you I want, not your money." Could he add that lie to the rest, now all was reversed, and it was her money he wanted, and not her? For it was the fact that, now he had a design upon the young lady's property, his former ardent wish to possess the girl herself grew cold, shrank, paled, and seemed ready to die outright.

Though he alone was to blame, it seemed to him as if she, like one of fate's accomplices, beckoned him on to destruction by means of the gold she displayed unpitifully to his wretched poverty.

How long Tom would have stood thinking is a question ; but he was at length called out of his apathy by the cheery voice of Mr. Saltring, who clapped him upon the shoulder with a ringing "good morning."

"Were you coming up to see Laura?" he asked.

Tom was obliged to think for a moment before he could reply. The thought seemed to come to him from a long distance, and he said, "Why, yes, I was going to call there first. I hope she has been able to sleep?"

"She has slept a little," said Mr. Saltring. "Of course, I sat up with her. I am the established nurse, you know."

"Has she told you yet how she burnt herself?" asked Towers, who was now back in the present.

"She won't tell. I hope your uncle wasn't annoyed by the ill-natured things she said to him last night? We could scarcely get her to have her arm dressed at all, and yet it isn't a large burn."

"She doesn't appear to me to lack courage," remarked Tom.

"Laura?" said Mr. Saltring. "No, she doesn't lack courage; and she doesn't lack a temper, and it was the latter that was active last night, I suspect. But you must be in a hurry, and I am keeping you." So the two parted.

When Towers arrived at Mr. Saltring's house, he was asked into the sitting-room which Keziah had occupied, where he found Miss Laura with all her bristles up, and Mrs. Saltring vainly trying to induce her to have some breakfast. At sight of young Towers, Laura said, "Why did you inconvenience yourself to come so early, Mr. Towers? There was no necessity."

Mrs. Saltring looked deprecatingly at her daughter, and asked the young doctor to take a seat.

"Have you had much pain, Miss Saltring?" he asked.

"Never mind about my pain," replied Laura; and she began to tear the bandage off, as if she scorned the idea of having pain.

Towers tried to stop her, and in the movement, Maud's letter, which he had all the while been carrying, fell on the floor unnoticed. With much tact, he induced the intractable girl to let him bandage her arm up.

"Will there be a scar?" asked Laura.

"Very likely, if you tear the bandages off, as you were about to do," answered Towers.

She turned her head impatiently away, and Tom took his leave. He was in a dream, scarcely knowing what he did, and only vaguely conscious that his feet were moving upon the ground. He visited patient after patient, mechanically; and at last when he went home, exhausted, he found his uncle in the surgery, at home first.

"Uncle," he said, with a groan, "I have heard from Miss Harwyn."

"Well?"

"She has found me out."

"Found you out?" echoed the doctor in a tone of real alarm. "For God's sake explain yourself."

"Here's the letter," said Tom, fumbling in his pocket, but in vain. Then with a new look of fear on his face, he turned out all the contents of his pockets, one by one, and having done so, looked blankly at his uncle.

"Have you lost it? Oh, Tom!"

The nephew slightly raised his shoulders in a helpless way, and faintly shook his head, with a look of misery in his face that Maud would never have forgotten if she could have seen it.

"Think, think, where can you have lost that letter?"

The only answer was a desolate shake of the head.

"Then tell me, do tell me, what the letter contained."

The contents of the letter were all Tom appeared able to remember. The words were burnt into his brain ; and he recited the letter almost word for word. "You know I always loved her, uncle, and it did seem to me a way out of our difficulties, but now I fear our last chance has gone."

After a little time, the elder man went out, forgetting his dinner ; and when he came home again, at half-past five, Tom was just where he had left him, but not the same. As soon as he saw his uncle, he laughed at him, and began to gabble German. The doctor, with a cry in his heart, but none on his tongue, went towards him ; but his nephew sprang upon him like a madman, and, still speaking German, called him Fate, and said he would have a hand-to-hand fight with him. It required the doctor's utmost strength to overcome this madman.

"Amy," he said, when his sister came in, "he is very ill ; he must be got to bed. I don't want this to be talked about ; but we can't get him to bed ourselves. Go yourself, and ask Mr. Saltring to come in."

Mr. Saltring, when he arrived, quiet and self-possessed, as if such a sight as this were quite a usual thing with him, asked no questions, but, with an infinite tenderness of manner, rendered any help he could ; and Tom was got to bed.

In the meantime Miss Laura Saltring had discovered the letter on the floor, and possessed herself of its contents. She understood the situation at once, or thought she did, and heartily despised young Towers. She decided that she would give the letter back into his own hand with a stinging comment on his carelessness. She could not, however, refrain from remarking to her father, when he came home and told her that young Towers was very ill, "I know why he is ill. He must be a very bad young man."

"Laura," said her father, almost pathetically, "I wish I could see more gentleness and kindheartedness in you. Where can you have learnt to be so unfeeling?"

"You are always reproving me, nearly, father, for something."

"When have I ever spoken harshly to you in my whole life?" said Mr. Saltring with deep emphasis. "If I were the only sufferer from your faults, I believe I could go on bearing them."

"You must have come right upstairs to lecture me."

"No, no, I came to read to you."

"I don't want to be read to to-night;" and so saying, Laura turned her face to the wall. And her father, patient and loving as he always was, took up a book and did read, till his daughter fell asleep.

The morning after this, Laura appeared in very good spirits, and asked for her writing-desk. She had thought of something that would make her important. She would write to Miss Harwyn and tell her how ill young Towers was, cleverly omitting any comment or allusion to the letter she had found. And she, child though she was, did so write her letter that Maud the acute believed that this was a mere innocent piece of information, and that Laura had written to say her arm was burnt.

Laura had the great satisfaction of hearing that, on the evening after Maud must have received her letter, she had come to the Laytons'. But she did not hear, what would have given her more satisfaction still, that Maud had had an interview with Dr. Towers, and had been taken to see his nephew, who was conscious and in his right mind, though greatly exhausted.

The meeting between these two had been of a most trying description. Maud, full of self-reproaches, protested that her letter had only been a freak; and young Towers faintly and ever more faintly refused the hand she now offered to him. But for his uncle he would have made a clean breast of it; for he felt that would have been the more honest course, if less wise in a worldly sense.

On the following day Laura heard, on good authority, that young Towers was engaged to Miss Harwyn, and that they were to marry as soon as Tom should be well enough, and go to Paris to get him strong again.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS.

EASTER had nearly come; and The Hollies was a scene of much activity and some little confusion. Maud was having her packing done for some months' stay abroad. Kizzy was making modest preparations for her wedding—which was like making her shroud, she said.

When the wedding-dresses came home, the girls put them on, and, covered with cloaks, went into The Chestnuts to show them to the grandmother.

"Ah, Kizzy," said the old lady, at sight of her attired in a white silk with lace flowers, "wilful waste makes woful want. David burnt my old dress this morning on the kitchen fire, and the key was in it ; and I had to search on my knees for it in the ashes."

"You should have asked one of the servants to do that," said Keziah.

"Very likely," replied the grandmother, "and let them know I had something to lock up? I sent them outside while I looked ; and I heard them laughing. That's what you come to when you are old, and all them dead and gone as cared for you."

"How can you say that, grandmother, when Uncle David is so kind to you?"

"Ah, he'll come to the workhouse himself, the way he wastes things. Better by half have saved your money," Mrs. Rimmon went on, looking at the dress. "I was married in a cotton dress as I could work in; had none of your gee-gaws and follow-me-ups."

"Look at Maud's dress," said Kizzy, half inclined to laugh.

She turned her eyes, and gazed fascinated at this miracle of the dressmaking art. It was of rich white brocaded satin.

"No use to do work in," observed Mrs. Rimmon after a minute or two.

"But Maud won't have to work," answered Keziah.

"She may come to it," said the grandmother, who, if she prophesied, always prophesied evil.

"Well, if I do," replied Maud, "I'll buy a dress to work in."

"It's always buy, buy, and never save, save. But there's David coming."

He heard what was going on, and he went into his dark drawing-room and closed the door. He took out of his pocket two little packets, one of which he kissed repeatedly. "My poor dead love, my poor dead love," he moaned. He must go and see Maud in her wedding-dress, which was his dead love's shroud. He composed himself, however, and went into the parlour.

Both girls looked superb. David saw but one of them. It was his dead love in her shroud. In a blundering, blind kind of way, he pushed the little box into Maud's hand, gave the other to Keziah, cast one long, anguished look at Maud, and fled from the room ; and in this act revealed his secret.

"Oh, how could you have done it, Maud?" said Keziah, her colour coming and going rapidly.

"I don't understand," said Maud in a broken voice ; and she looked

with tears in her eyes at her friend, and then the tears fell upon the rich dress.

"Oh, let us go and take them off, they are so unlucky," said Keziah; and without another word of adieu they left.

Silently they removed the finery. Then Maud threw herself upon her friend's neck, saying, "Do me justice, Kizzy; we are just going to part. Indeed, indeed, I did not know he was caring for me."

"I do believe you," replied Keziah affectionately; "but, O Maud, poor Uncle David!" They cried a little together, and then opened their packets. They were both alike, small gold brooches, set with emeralds and pearls.

This was their last night together. The next day Keziah was to go to Jumley, and Maud to Bristol. The nurse and the baby were to remain at The Hollies till Keziah's new home should be ready to receive them.

Mr. Hackbit had been making extensive preparations at Mr. Rimmon's expense; and it was no mean house he had taken and furnished, though it was in Jumley, and near Mr. Rimmon's own.

"Why, Thomas," Mr. Rimmon had said to his nephew, "why should you live in a house three times as good as mine?"

"Because you know I am worth that expenditure to you."

"Oh, to be out of your power!" said Mr. Rimmon desperately.

Mr. Hackbit had not drunk a single glass of spirits since his engagement to Keziah. Mr. Saltring knew of the fact, and congratulated him. "There is nothing for it but not touching a drop," he said, "for men who have ever given way to it."

This was two days before Keziah's wedding, and Miss Dorcas, in the act of damaging the reputation of the dressmaker who made Keziah's wedding-dress, made her comments all the more loudly, seeing Mr. Saltring walk in.

"How do you do, Miss Rimmon?" he said, holding out his hand frankly, with a friendly smile on his jovial face.

"No, thank you, sir, I shall not shake hands," said Miss Dorcas, "after the way you've treated me."

"I'm sure I'm very sorry if I've offended you," replied the wine merchant; but the milliner would not hear him, and went out of the room.

Then Mr. Saltring displayed before Keziah's eyes a silver tea and coffee service, which he gave with many kind expressions and sincere hopes for her happiness. "I almost look upon you as my own child," he said affectionately. "We missed you sadly after you left us. They say,

handsome is that handsome does ; perhaps that's why you are so beautiful."

While this was happening, Maud, at her brother's at Bristol, was wearied out with preparations. Mr. Towers was to come the next day and sleep at the Vicarage. Neither his uncle nor his aunts were coming to the wedding ; but the Laytons were, and, of course, Gerald. Laura Saltring was to be a bridesmaid ; "for," as Maud observed to her sister-in-law, "she is such a dear innocent little girl, and was the unconscious means of bringing about our match."

The dear innocent little thing was pre-eminently occupied in planning ways and means of fascinating the male part of the guests.

The two weddings came off on the same day. Nothing noteworthy happened at either, except perhaps that Mrs. Rimmon wore a new dress of brown silk—a truly extraordinary event.

CHAPTER XXV.

WARNING NOTES.

IT was August, about sixteen months after the events last narrated, and Mr. Thomas Hackbit was comfortably seated at his breakfast table, which was spread in no mean style. He had his newspaper, and was, on the whole, very complacent.

Our little friend Kizzy, in a fresh morning print, had on her face that subdued and tender look which comes sometimes with motherhood. The sweet face, though a thought too grave, was, nevertheless, as irresistible as in former days. The patient pathos of the eyes was in fact a new and all-powerful charm. A woman whose face compels compassion, above all a beautiful woman—is she not the most attractive creature on earth?

This look of endurance on Kizzy's face, however, was no attraction to her husband, knowing as he did the cause. It was not pleasant to him that this woman always behaved faultlessly, yet did everything as a penance. Why did she not fly out, as she would have done in the old days, and rain scorn upon him, nay, box his ears ? He would have liked that. Had the poor child tried to be aggravating, she could not have succeeded better.

"I say, Kizzy," remarked Hackbit, looking up from his paper, "what

do you want to parade yourself as a saint for? I wanted a wife, not a sister of mercy; and at all hours of the day, or night, for that matter, you are off to somebody's sick child, or to a burnt collier, or to the Lord knows who. Once for all, I don't like it."

A little of the old fire flashed in the girl's face, as she said a trifle sharply, "Do you wish to stop what helps to make me a good wife to you?"

"That's just it," responded the solicitor wrathfully; "your devotion to me requires so much bolstering up."

"You knew when I married you," replied the girl, "that I had no heart to give you. You cannot ask more now than that I should be a dutiful wife; but it is no part of my duty to you to refuse to help those in distress; and in this one thing I will not obey you."

"Well, don't get bringing any more orphans for me to bring up; one's quite enough."

Keziah, with tears welling into her eyes, went out of the room. How her experiment seemed to have failed! What a bitter disappointment everything was! This sacrifice of hers, might it not be all for nothing? Her father had not bettered his ways. She had done no good to anybody. She lost faith in her theory of redemption. Yet this poor child struggled bitterly to do what she deemed her duty. The cares of a grown woman were upon her when most girls are under a mother's charge. She was already a mother, without the experience necessary to the fostering of a young life. Hers was a dreary prospect.

Mr. Hackbit had certainly not taken ardently to his foster-son, Bertram, the infant of the colliery explosion night; and now that he saw him racing about, sturdy, and self-willed, he wished he could have had his bargain to make over again. He would have struck this boy's name out of it. He was jealous, too, of every caress his wife lavished upon the orphan, and viewed it in the light of robbery from his own son and heir, who had been christened Leonard.

When Mrs. Hackbit had left the breakfast-room, her husband looked at his watch, and then went out himself. As he was leaving the house, he passed Sarah, who was coming with a message for Keziah from her mother. Strange to say, this annoyed him too. He did not like these constant communications between mother and daughter.

"Oh, Miss Kizzy," said Sarah, coming into the house, "your mother wants you just to come in a minute."

Keziah put on her hat and went at once:

"What is the matter, mother?" she inquired, on reaching her old home.

By way of answer, Mrs. Rimmon took her daughter into the dining-room, and there solemnly handing her a letter from Jubal, watched her face while she read it. It was dated from his uncle David's house, and ran as follows :—

"DEAR FATHER,—I told you when I came back from school, that nothing could make me stay another term, though to please Mr. Harwyn, not you, I stayed after the last notice was given. Once for all, do you consent that I should go into my uncle David's mill, or shall I act for myself? I give you this opportunity of behaving well in this matter. I shall not trouble you with another. My uncle would expect no premium with me, which I know will weigh with you, though no other argument would. Nowhere could I get such advantages. May I ask you to reply as soon as possible, as I must make arrangements?—Yours truly, "J. RIMMON."

"What is father going to do?" asked Keziah.

"He won't consent to the plan."

"And why, I wonder?"

"Because he has already made arrangements. Jubal is to learn prospecting for coal, and to be bound to Mr. Surlesden."

Keziah's face clouded. "I wish it had been someone else," she said.

"For that matter it's all as one," said Mrs. Rimmon. "It's no good binding a lad anywhere against his will."

"Mr. Surlesden doesn't bear a good character in Jumley," said Keziah; "that's the worst feature in the case."

"What do you think Jubal will do, Keziah?" said Mrs. Rimmon, studying her daughter's face attentively.

"That depends upon what outside influence is brought to bear upon him," answered Keziah.

"But who is there to influence Jubal?" said Mrs. Rimmon, inquiringly.

"Well," replied Keziah, "I can and I can't answer that; but I put it to you, mother, where is Jubal most at home—here or away? and isn't the home influence likely to be strongest? Jubal has almost lived at the Saltrings' when not at school. The question to my mind is—which of those two homes of Jubal's has most influence? Jumley is out of the question."

"Jubal has changed a great deal lately," remarked Mrs. Rimmon; "ever since he went to the Saltrings'. I wish you could go and see him, Keziah. I really think it would be better if he did what his father wishes."

"Well, mother," replied Keziah, "if I must speak frankly, I should

not know what to advise Jubal ; and I'll tell you why. I believe Jubal requires a firmer hand than Uncle David's. Uncle David would be too kind to him ; and I don't fancy he'd take to manufacturing. On the other hand, I don't think this Mr. Surlesden is a suitable man at all. Nevertheless, I consider it would be unwise in Jubal to thwart his father. In that case Jubal would have to struggle without his father's money to get a position ; and, I believe"—and here Keziah dropped her voice to an impressive whisper—"that there are those who would rejoice if he gave his father cause to disinherit him."

Mrs. Rimmon opened her eyes with astonishment at this, and could not be brought to understand.

"Well, it will be settled some way at any rate, for your father's going to Manchester to-morrow to have it out with Jubal."

"I am sorry he's going there," said Keziah, "very sorry. But I'm glad you've told me. I shall write and prepare Jubal." With this she took her leave ; and Mrs. Rimmon appeared much comforted by the mere fact that her daughter knew what had occurred.

As she was turning in at her gate, she noticed a stranger on the steps looking curiously at the house, as if uncertain whether to ring or not. Keziah went up to him directly, believing him to be an applicant for the position of clerk to her husband ; for it was his latest project to have a resident confidential clerk. She was within two paces of him. He remained motionless, staring at her with a trance-like look on his face. She uttered a little muffled cry ; and suddenly forgetting herself in one absorbing thought, she stretched out both her hands. It was James Elworthy. He took a step backwards as she approached him, and cast an unbending, pitiless look upon her.

"Don't look at me in that way," said Keziah, "as if I were your bitterest enemy."

Elworthy laughed.

"What have you come here for?" Keziah asked.

"Not to see you," shortly replied her old lover. "I was not aware you lived here until I saw your husband's name"—this with a sneer—"on the gate."

"Oh, Rupert," said Keziah, with her hands convulsively clasped together, "you would not look at me so if you knew all. I have not been all blameworthy."

"Do not trouble yourself to discuss that question," Elworthy replied. "I will wish you a good morning."

He was moving away. . Keziah seized him by the arm, and would not let him go. She spoke in a fevered whisper, and the words followed each other fast.

"Rupert, tell me this one thing ; don't refuse me." He had turned his head away from her. "Tell me with your own lips you did not send me a letter owning dreadful things." He was silent. "Give me this one thing to live on all the long weary years until I die," Keziah continued, her eyes dilating.

He looked down at her with burning eyes, trembling visibly, and said hoarsely—"You hardly deserve that comfort, Keziah ; yet I will give it you. No, I never wrote such a letter."

He was turning once more to go. She once more stopped him. "Rupert," she said in a choking voice, "speak a single kind word to me before you go."

"How can I?" he said, in a tone full of anguish ; and dashed away.

Keziah watched his retreating figure with strained eyes, her hands still clasped together, her face as white as the morning dress she wore. The figure was gone ; she continued staring in the direction it had taken, until she heard a voice addressing her from behind.

"Pardon me, Madam, but are you Mrs. Hackbit?"

This time it was a stranger ; but his voice, for some reason, made Mrs. Hackbit shudder.

"Yes," she replied, in a nervous tone, "I am."

"My name is Silas Rimpler. I am the new clerk Mr. Hackbit engaged, and happening to be free from my former engagement earlier than I anticipated, I have come in order to give Mr. Hackbit the benefit."

It flashed through Keziah's mind that this man must have seen her speaking with Rupert, and she felt sick at heart. It was with a great effort that she asked him to come into the house.

Mr Rimpler was a short, thickset man, with very much the appearance of a bull-dog ; and poor Keziah looked on him with abhorrence.

He followed her into the breakfast-room, with a strange leer on his countenance, and when inside he remarked, "Mr. Hackbit is from home, is he not?" This was said in a dry, hard tone, which was nevertheless polite enough.

Keziah wondered what made him think her husband was away ; and she answered almost with a look of enquiry on her face, "Yes, he is

from home, and I can't say when he will be back ; but I don't think he'll be very long, because he has no one to leave in the office."

"Yes, you have the offices attached here, have you not?" replied Mr. Rimpler. "I should like to look at them."

"I think my husband would prefer to show them you himself," said Keziah nervously, and not at all sure of her ground. "But you will take some refreshment?"

"I don't mind a glass of wine."

Keziah blushed. "We don't keep any," she said.

"Oh, indeed," said Mr. Rimpler. "Teetotallers, eh?"

"Yes," said Keziah faintly.

"Then I will take nothing, thank you, until dinner. You dine early, do you not?"

"Yes, at half-past one."

She had scarcely said these words when the door was pushed open, and a little boy, who might have been two years and a half old, entered and took hold of her gown.

"One of your little ones?" asked Mr. Rimpler, indicating the child.

"No," said Keziah, "he's an adopted child, but quite as dear to us as our own."

"How many have you, may I ask?"

"One," replied Keziah. "Where's Leonard, Bertram?" she added, addressing the child, who was holding her skirts.

"He's in the garden, mother," answered the little fellow, with scarcely any childish lisp.

Mr. Rimpler looked at the boy attentively, and seemed to see more in him than a handsome child. He appeared to be racking his brains for some circumstance or person that this child called to his mind. If this were the case, he dismissed the idea, and asked Keziah if he might see her own child.

"Ask Wilson to bring Leonard," said Keziah to Bertram, in answer. The little fellow flew to obey.

In a short space of time the tall figure of Wilson, the nurse, appeared, bearing in her arms a healthy baby, who was quite a miniature of his father, even to a half-cynical look, at which Mr. Rimpler laughed when he saw it, declaring that he had never seen so young a child with so sage an expression. Little Bertram, who had returned with them, flushed with pleasure on hearing his little brother praised, as he thought ; and

mildly suggested, with his face half-hidden in his foster-mother's gown, that Lenny could play bo-peep, and do lots of other things.

Mr. Hackbit returned for dinner, and appeared very glad to see Mr. Rimpler; and with a certain ostentation showed him over the well-planned offices attached to his house.

After dinner Mr. Hackbit informed Keziah that Mr. Rimpler would stay in the house, as he wished him to be always on the spot.

"Is he to remain here always?" she asked.

"Certainly," said Mr. Hackbit shortly. "Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know," was Keziah's answer; "I only wanted to know." And she went away with a slow step and a look of great discomfort on her face. She went to the nursery, a large room at the top of the house, where Wilson sat sewing, and Bertram and Leonard were rolling upon the floor.

Wilson looked up as she entered, and dropped the garment she was making into her lap, and openly studied Keziah's countenance.

"What is the matter, m'm?" she asked.

Keziah flushed. "Nothing," she said. "What made you ask?"

"Oh, nothing," replied Wilson, retiring into herself, and fixing her face into an expression of a strictly non-committal type.

"Mr. Rimpler is going to stay here," went on Keziah.

"Always?" asked Wilson, just as Keziah had done.

"Yes. So we must decide what room to give up to him."

"Wouldn't one of the attics do, m'm?" said Wilson, in a rasping tone.

A slow smile broke on Keziah's face. That remark was enough to show her what impression Mr. Rimpler had made upon Wilson.

"Well, not exactly," replied Keziah. "It must either be the room facing the street, or the one opposite the night nursery."

Wilson looked stony at this announcement, and said in an icy manner, "I can't help it, m'm, but I'm sure no good will come to this house if that man stays in it."

The words seemed to strike Keziah cold, not because of what they were merely, but because they echoed a repressed thought in her own heart. She crushed it instantly, and said as strongly as she was able, "That is all rubbish, Wilson. Superstitious people never have any peace. I would advise you to give it up."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A CLASH AND A CRASH.

ON the evening of the day after Keziah's talk with her mother about Jubal, Joshua Rimmon presented himself at The Chestnuts, Bowdon. He looked older and greyer, and had anxiety stamped upon his countenance, in place of his former expression of determined self-will.

This was the first occasion on which Mr. Rimmon had seen his brother David's house. As he had been wont to remark to his acquaintances at Jumley, they were not a visiting family.

While Mr. Rimmon rang the bell, he could not help feeling some elation in prospect of the surprise and discomfort he was about to bring to this homely household, for he had not written to say he was coming, for fear Jubal should go out.

The servant who opened the door scanned his features, and judged him to be a drawing-room visitor from the severity of his look ; and was about to show him in, when David, who had heard his brother's voice, came to him at once, all in a flurry. A visit from Joshua boded no good, and David knew it.

The two shook hands mechanically, and David took Joshua into the parlour. He was the taller of the two brothers, and Mrs. Rimmon, happening to look up, perceived her first-born's head above that of her younger son, and sprang up in her chair with as much agility as if she were still young, wringing her hands, and protesting she would not go back with him.

This was not at all pleasant for the visitor, and not in the least flattering. Joshua turned red, and said in a biting tone to his brother—

"She is still mad, I see."

A fresh voice replied to this statement ; it was Jubal, who was in the room, though his father had not hitherto noticed him. There was enough of him to be seen, however, if his father had looked in his direction, for Jubal had grown apace in the past year, and now confronted his father with his face on the same level, and with the down of a coming moustache on his upper lip, and a very decisive bearing indeed.

"Grandmother's in the wrong hands to be mad," this young gentleman said, with a sardonic smile.

Mr. Rimmon darted an intensely angry look at his son, whom he had never once beheld since Keziah's marriage, owing to his having spent his

holidays away from home ; and seeing him, his size took his breath away. He had no words to reply with ; and Mrs. Rimmon drew everyone's attention to herself by wailing out—

"Oh Joshua, I know what you've come for ; you shall have it, and then go." And she fumbled in her pocket, and impulsively threw the sewn-up key at her first-born.

Mr. Rimmon's face was livid. "What do you mean, you idiot?" he cried, utterly forgetting himself.

David clutched at the table to steady himself ; but Jubal seized his father by both arms, and pinioned him against the wall. "You dare to speak another word like that," he hissed, "and I'll fling you into the street."

But Jubal, though tall, had not his father's weight ; and as soon as Mr. Rimmon had recovered from his surprise, he flung his son off with comparative ease, and said to his brother in a tone scarcely anyone ever heard him use—

"This is what you are training him to do, is it ; to turn on his own father?"

"Is that at all likely, Joshua?" gasped David.

"Yes, it is, you sneaking fool," said Mr. Rimmon.

"Every word you have spoken here to-night shall be reported all over Jumley," put in Jubal, "I give you my word for it."

"And another report shall go hand-in-hand with it," retorted his father, his teeth chattering with anger ; "the report that Joshua Rimmon has disinherited his son, and will have no more to do with him. Never you set your foot inside my door again, on any pretence whatever, or I will have you kicked into the street."

"I'm not sure I couldn't make you give me shelter," replied Jubal, "but I'd rather beg my bread. Oh, don't fear, uncle David," he said, turning his flushed face on his uncle, who was ghastly. "We'll get on all right, you and I. Let that cowardly miser keep all his ill-gotten gains."

Mrs. Rimmon had sunk into her chair, and was babbling.

Joshua left, without a word of adieu.

And thus ended his first visit to his brother.

As soon as the hall-door had closed behind him, Jubal and his uncle looked at each other anxiously. David was the first to speak.

"Jubal, I don't talk much, so you are the likelier to remember the little I do say. Do you remember what I said at your father's house, about keeping a nest for his children, if ever they should want one?"

"I was not there," replied Jubal, "but Keziah told me what you said."

"Ah, I remember," continued David, passing his hand over his brow; "you were at the Saltrings'. Well, I didn't know how soon you would need me; but you are not an unexpected guest, Jubal; the home has long been ready for you."

"Oh uncle," cried Jubal, "you are too good to me, you are, indeed. But for you, I believe I should go down right to the bad; for father has kept my brain in a ferment of anger all my life; and sometimes I have felt that I would ruin father, if it cost me a life's work to do it."

"Never think of it again, Jubal," said his uncle impressively. "It never pays to try and do God's work for Him; we are too ignorant and too weak."

Jubal looked sullen, as if he could not shake off a feeling which was the outcome of years, in one moment, at another's bidding.

"I tell you what you can do, Jubal," went on David, noting the boy's look with some alarm; "you can become an honourable man, without reproach, in spite of your training, in spite of all. That should be your greatest triumph."

"Oh, uncle," said Jubal, "I can't act with you; or at this moment I should pretend to promise you all you ask. I can hardly even say I will try to do what you wish; my heart is too bitter. I have been so used to having such thoughts as these that I can't break myself; I have lost the taste for anything better, if ever I had it."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LIVING DEATH OF LOVE.

A WEEK later, Mrs. Beredith and her daughter Lucy were driving to Kenilworth by way of Stone Court, and were noticing a number of fox-hounds disporting themselves on the ill-kept grass in front of the Court. While they were looking, they saw James Elworthy come out at the door, and mount his horse; and Mrs. Beredith stopped her carriage to wait for him.

"Why, doctor," she said, rubbing her fat hands one over the other, as was her habit when much pleased, "you have actually been called in to Stone Court, then?"

"Yes," the young man answered, with a faint smile; "Lady Conquest

is taken suddenly ill. I was called in because their own medical man lives at a distance."

"If you are not too busy," Mrs. Beredith said, "will you step in to-night?"

"I was about to say I was coming in," said Elworthy. "I have something I wish to say to you, and all the past week I have been dreadfully busy. And I must be off now," he added, looking at his watch, "or I shall not finish till late." So, raising his hat in a solemn manner, he rode away; and the ladies went on to Kenilworth, and talked about nothing but Dr. Elworthy and Keziah Hackbit.

"You know, Lucy," said Mrs. Beredith, "it was horrid of Keziah to marry her cousin, even if she did not believe in Elworthy."

"So I think," replied Lucy warmly. "She might at least have waited."

"If she had waited, it would never have happened," said her mother.

"I am glad that he came back to Leamington," said Lucy. "It shows everybody he has nothing to be ashamed of."

"I don't know that altogether," said Mrs. Beredith. "I think he ought to be, and is very much ashamed of having shown himself such a coward."

"Well, mother, you would not hear anybody else say what you are saying."

"I defend Dr. Elworthy," replied Mrs. Beredith, "because I think that the worst thing he ever did was no great sin. But that doesn't blind me to the fact that it was cowardly of him to go away and hide himself. He ought to have trusted in God not to let the wrong man suffer."

"But do you believe, mother, that the right one always does come off clear?"

This question rather nonplussed Mrs. Beredith, who could express her theories and beliefs, but was rarely able to bring forward any conclusive proofs when asked for them, which was somewhat a drawback.

As Mrs. Beredith was silent, Lucy ventured to put a further question.

"Suppose, mother, that you had quarrelled very much with somebody, till everybody knew you to be his enemy, and talked about it. And suppose that that somebody had been found dead by you, and it flashed into your mind, 'I shall be the first one they will take into custody for this, and they may hang me,' I think, mother, you might run away and hide yourself, under a false name, with that thought, although you might regret it later on. Afterwards every day would make it harder to disclose your real name."

"You are quite coming out, Lucy," was Mrs. Beredith's comment. "I had no idea you could argue in that style."

Lucy blushed deeply, and did not own, as she might have done, that she was but quoting from memory. She had heard this said by a friend who had called at their house to another lady visitor, who was debating whether or not to call in Dr. Elworthy again when he had returned to Leamington after his acquittal.

"I can't understand Keziah's marrying," went on Lucy. "If I loved a man as she seemed to love him, I should remain single for his sake, even if he were ever so false to me."

"You never know what you will do," replied her mother, "until you are put to the test; and we can't tell what influenced Keziah. And," she went on, her eyes growing moist, "if I hadn't as good as dismissed her by aggravating her so at Mr. Saltring's, all this might never have happened, and the poor lamb would have come back here, and he would have come back, and all would have been right, I am sure. I at any rate have not been free from blame in the matter."

"I don't see that at all, mother. Keziah ought to have known you well enough not to get angry at what you said. And it was very unfair of her to leave us in the way she did;"—this in a smothered tone of regret for a lost companion who had made her life so happy.

"Do you know, Lucy, I somehow fancy that Rupert is going to call to say something about Keziah to-night. There was that in his face that I have never seen unless Keziah was in the question."

"Is it possible that he can have seen her?" said Lucy.

"Impossible," replied her mother. "I have never told him where she is living, though I should have done so if he had asked me. I am sure he would not ask anybody but myself; and even if he knew, he is too honourable to go near her."

"He may have seen her by accident," Lucy suggested.

"That's possible," her mother agreed. "Poor fellow!" she sighed.

That evening, about seven o'clock, Mrs. Beredith and her daughter were sitting in their drawing-room with their embroidery in their laps, at an open window overlooking the garden, which was now fragrant with flowers. There were two entrances to their house: the one was close upon the street, the other led through the garden quite from the opposite direction. Rupert entered oftenest through the garden gate, being on such friendly terms with the family. He could thus come upon them unawares and without ringing; and this evening the two ladies saw him

approaching from between the rose-bushes, his erect figure moving gravely towards them, and his face wearing the faintest possible smile. He slowly took off his hat as he saw them looking at him ; every movement of his was slow now. His pulse was slow. He had grown old too soon. Only one thing had power to fire him ; we have seen what that was.

The window at which the ladies were seated opened to the ground, and Rupert passed in, saying in his gentle musical voice, "Dear Mrs. Beredith, grant me a favour to-night."

"What is it?" she enquired.

"Don't think it too much," he responded. "Let me call you mother; I shall feel nearer to you, and more able to speak ; not that I can feel more to you than I have done ever since you came to me in my sore need."

"My poor, dear boy," replied Mrs. Beredith, as if he really belonged to her, "of course you must call me mother, not only to-night, but always ; and Lucy shall be your sister."

"Yes," put in that young lady heartily, "I will, indeed."

He seated himself behind Mrs. Beredith, and said huskily, "Mother, I have seen her."

"How did it come about?" Mrs. Beredith asked, stroking his hair with her plump hand, for his head now sank low.

"It was in this way," he began. "There had been an advertisement in the *Lancet* from a medical man leaving Jumley. He offered his instruments and books for sale at a low figure, and I went to Jumley to see if there was anything that suited me. I went early in the morning on my freest day, and I suddenly saw her husband's name on a gate leading to a fine house, and I stood staring at it as if petrified. While I stood there, she came along the road, in a white dress."

He was silent after this, and Mrs. Beredith softly asked him, "Did you speak to her?"

"She spoke to me."

"What did she say, my poor darling?" said Mrs. Beredith tenderly.

Elworthy raised his face, the muscles of which were working in evident agitation. "She asked me," said he, "if I had written a letter to her owning dreadful things."

Lucy at this point raised both her hands, with a scared look at her mother, but said not a word.

"Then, some villain deceived her," Mrs. Beredith broke out, in a tone of conviction, "What villainy! Oh, that we could get to know

who wrote that letter! Did you tell her you had not written it?" she went on.

"Yes, I told her," he said, sorrowfully. "But what good can that do now? There is nothing left now."

"There is something left," said Mrs. Beredith. "We might find out who wrote the letter."

"She knew my writing very well," said Elworthy. "It must have been a clever forgery to impose on her."

"It's that Hackbit, you may depend," said Lucy, now putting in her word. "He wanted her himself."

"I see the same hand in this as that which betrayed me to the police," said Elworthy.

"Whose hand?" asked Mrs. Beredith, breathless.

"That I can't say," answered the doctor.

"Do you mean you don't know?" said Mrs. Beredith.

"Yes, I don't know," he made answer.

"But you suspect?" suggested his new mother.

"I may suspect," he said; "but I ought not to say whom I suspect."

"You may depend it's that Hackbit," again put in Lucy, "for he has got all the gain out of the business, at any rate."

But the doctor said nothing in answer to this, and all of them were silent for some minutes. At last Elworthy said—

"I got one comfort out of seeing her."

"What was that?"

"She doesn't look happy," he said bitterly. "She's thinner, and paler, and older looking."

"Oh, Rupert," said Mrs. Beredith, "that's not like you, to be glad of such a thing."

"No, it's cowardly to say it," he said, grinding his foot upon the floor. "I'm not half the man I was—I have grown so bitter. But I own the truth when I say it made me glad to see she was not happy without me. Had she looked happy, I think it would have driven me mad. Ah!" he said, stretching out his arms, as if to grasp an imaginary object, "I could have made her happy. She has brought it on herself." And with these words he rose and stood with his back to the mantelpiece, and his chin lying low upon his breast.

"My dear Rupert," said Mrs. Beredith, "don't you think you had better try and never think of her? It can't be good for you."

"Try and not think of her!" said Elworthy, with a scornful laugh.

"Not think of her whose presence has lightened the drudgery of my work so long ; whose presence made even the prison cell light to me. Not think of her who stood by my bedside all through my delirium, when I was ill after my trial was over ! Take away my life and I won't think of her—that is, if men cease to think when they die."

Mrs. Beredith became very serious, and said impressively, "If it is a safety-valve for you to speak to me of her from time to time, do so ; but for Heaven's sake, for your own sake, for Keziah's sake, think as little as you can."

"Do you think I would harm her ?" said Elworthy bitterly.

"Oh, I don't know what I think," said Mrs. Beredith, "but the whole business frightens me."

"It need not trouble you," was Elworthy's reply. "I know my duty to another man's wife. But it kills me to think of the worn look on her face, and I can't help cursing him for not making her happy."

"Why, a moment ago you said that was your comfort," said Mrs. Beredith anxiously.

"Ah," he said, "I don't know what I say or what I think sometimes ;" and he took up his hat as if about to go.

"Stay and have some supper with us, Rupert." Mrs. Beredith had grown so accustomed to think of him by this name that she still employed it.

"No," he said, holding his hat in front of him, and looking down into it at a stethoscope that was there ensconced, "not to-night ;" and with an apathetic shake-hands he passed out through the window, and took two or three strides down the gravel path. He turned suddenly, and retraced his steps ; and, holding out his hand to Mrs. Beredith once more, said—

"A thousand thanks, my dear friend and mother, for your ready sympathy and kindness. Forgive me if I seem brusque. I have not grown accustomed to my fate yet." And as he passed between the rose-bushes once more, he thought—"Had I loved Lucy Beredith instead of Keziah Rimmon, she would have been faithful ; and I almost think that had Keziah never come, I might have loved Lucy. But this is always the way of Fate." And for the first time the thought flashed in his mind that poor Lucy might even yet love him ; and he thought with admiration of the unselfish way in which she had acted when he had disclosed his love for Keziah, how she had sympathised throughout, how ungrudgingly she had always praised Keziah, until Keziah had left him ; and he

thought with bitterness that he could not even make this poor child happy by marrying her. Keziah had brought herself to marry another, whom he firmly believed she did not love ; but he could not. No, not even now that he had proof of her being false to him.

And has the reader, too, suspected Lucy's well-hidden secret ? If so, no one around her suspected it, so well did that simple-hearted girl conceal it. How often we find that the weakest amongst us have surpassing strength in some one particular. Lucy was a very ordinary girl, and could never have understood a problem in Euclid ; and yet she had understood the problem of her own life, and was working it out in her own simple way.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A DEPARTURE, AND A NEW DEPARTURE.

WHILE poor Elworthy had been pouring out his heart to Mrs. Beredith, Keziah Hackbit was being carried by express train to Manchester, whither she had been summoned by an imperative telegram.

The telegram ran thus :—" Your grandmother says she must see you. Come quickly. She is near the end." And at the moment when Elworthy was passing between Mrs. Beredith's rose-bushes on his way to his desolate lodgings, Keziah was passing up her Uncle David's garden path.

Never since her marriage had Keziah been so miserable as this night, coming to her uncle's house. The perfume in the garden, even the creaking of the gate, seemed to say to her, " You were free then ; now you are bound ; " and none who have never been bound can know the depth of misery conveyed in this thought.

She rang the bell, and, having done so, was startled when the door was opened ; she had forgotten that she had rung.

The servant, whose face was quite familiar to her, was amazed that Keziah, who had always shown herself so friendly, should not offer her a single word of greeting.

" Your poor grandma's very ill," she said to Keziah.

This reminded Keziah what she had come for.

" Oh, poor grandma," she said. " Who is with her ? "

"Well, the doctor's there, miss," answered the girl, who had seen Keziah only when unmarried.

Keziah went upstairs to her grandmother's room without delay. The old lady was high up in the bed, supported by a number of pillows, and was looking, with eyes already glazing, towards the door. She was watching for her grand-daughter, and yet when she saw her enter, took her for a stranger.

"Don't let people come to see me die," she cried, clasping her hands together. "I want Keziah. Why don't you tell her to come? I have something to tell her."

Keziah went and knelt down by the bedside, and took the thin hand that had toiled so long for the sons who had since grown prosperous, and was at length going to its long rest. "Grandmother," said she, "don't you know me? I am Kizzy."

"You, Kizzy! No you are not. I know my singing-bird. You can't deceive me. My singing-bird had rosy cheeks. You haven't. Her eyes were bright. Yours aren't. She was pretty. You are not."

Keziah moaned, and hid her face. The old lady looked at David. "Davy," she said, "you've not sent for her, or she would have come. I'm sure singing-bird would have come."

After saying these words, the old lady's eyes became fixed on something in the corner of the room. All eyes followed in the same direction. They could see nothing extraordinary; nothing in fact, but an old-fashioned bureau.

"Oh," said the old lady, "but that's beautiful, that is beautiful!"

"What is beautiful?" asked David, the tears coursing down his cheeks. "What is it you see that's beautiful?"

"Why, Davy," she said. "It isn't the forges; but it's very bright. Now it's very good of you to bring me into such a bright place to die in." And she continued to stare.

Keziah was now crying bitterly.

The old lady gave a start, and withdrew her eyes. They rested once more on David.

"Davy," she said. "Burn this. Don't let Joshua know. Burn it. He wouldn't let me rest in my grave if he knew I had left it." And she gave a crumpled piece of paper into David's hand.

It contained nothing, and nothing was written on it.

After this, the bright light came once more into her face, and she fell to rocking herself to and fro, and singing softly, so very softly and faintly

that it sounded like somebody else singing, quite in the distance. She looked very happy. All the care had gone out of her face. She softly stroked one of her hands, and cooed to it, and said something. David bent low to listen.

"He's a bonny lad," she was heard to say, "and he shall be a gentleman;" and she patted her hand again, and stroked it tenderly. "He shall be a gentleman, and shan't have to strive and work, and scrape like us; and we shall all live so happy."

"Oh," moaned David, "she thinks it's one of her children, a baby in her arms."

The old lady caught his words. "It is little Joshua," she said, "a bonny lad, a pretty lad. He'll grow up and take care of his mother one day; and how fast he grows," she said, admiringly, looking at the imaginary burden in her arms.

All at once her eyes were again fixed where they had been previously, and she raised her hand and pointed, and then began rapidly counting. "One—two—three—four—well it's beautiful—one—two—three—four—five"—her hand dropped; her eyes remained staring; and her lips moved, as if still counting something.

"Oh, mother, mother," said David, laying his head beside hers on the pillow, "my poor mother." Her eyes moved towards him one moment, and her fingers twitched, as if she would try to touch him, but the power was gone.

With her eyes thus fastened upon him, she passed from death to life; and no one knew the precise moment of her release.

No one attempted to move, till the doctor said, in a low tone, "It's all over."

Keziah looked up. "Oh," she said in a tone of anguish. "I wish I could have got here sooner." And as she raised her streaming face, her eyes met Jubal's. His expression puzzled her greatly.

"Jubal," she said to him, "come down stairs; I want to speak to you."

She rose with weariness of step, and passed out at the door without addressing her uncle a word. He scarcely noticed her going out.

Jubal followed her at once. He had not been on the best terms with his sister since her marriage; he had disapproved of the whole thing. He was therefore inclined to disapprove of any observation she might make, if she had called him out to advise him, which he believed to be her purpose. She had always been very free in advising him. Jubal had thought this over, and decided that he would have no more of Keziah's

dictation ; he would have no more of that than he would of his father's. Keziah had often twitted him with not being manly. He would show her he was manly now, and was not to be interfered with.

As soon as they were outside the bedroom door, Keziah said to Jubal, putting her arm round him, in a manner she had never done in the old days, "Dear Jubal, let us be friends always, Jubal. I have so little to make me happy," she went on, hesitating, her voice being a pleading in itself. "Oh, Jubal," she continued, for he made no reply, "you won't let me lose everything? You will let me have a brother left?"

His silence drove her to say more than she had intended, and she was much overwrought by what she had just seen.

"Jubal," she began again, "you mustn't forsake me, I am so very miserable."

"It's your own fault," said Jubal, turning his head away. "You brought it on yourself."

The words struck a chill to poor Keziah's heart ; but with a great effort she said, in a coaxing way, still clutching him, "Jubal, when we were at home"—she said hesitatingly these last two words—"and I was sometimes sharp to you, you used to say to me, 'You shouldn't kick anyone who is down, Kizzy.'"

"And you did it," broke in Jubal.

"Well, if I did, forgive me," said his sister pleadingly. "I only meant to help you."

Jubal had grown too embittered to be easily moved now by his sister's words ; and it aggravated him to hear her talk in such a strain. So he said to her, with some authority in the tone—

"As people make their beds, so they must lie on them. If you have made yours badly, I can't help it. You never asked my advice."

This was too much for Keziah. She left her brother and went downstairs. She felt frozen up. She regretted now, above all, that she had said she was miserable. She had laid open her wound, and it had been scoffed at. She was past all help, and must bear on till the end. And she thought with horror that she was so young, and had, in all probability, many years to live.

She had sat before the fire a long time when David came downstairs. The doctor had gone before, but Keziah had not heard him go ; she had heard nothing since Jubal's last words. She had counted so intensely on Jubal's sympathising with her.

David, when he saw Keziah's melancholy attitude, of course did not

ascribe it to its real cause. How seldom the right cause is assigned for a sad look !

"It's all over now, Kizzy," he said to her, in a tone he meant to be encouraging ; "she's better off."

"Yes," assented Keziah faintly, "she is better off."

The tone in which she spoke caused her uncle to look her full in the face.

"Why, Kizzy, you do look ill," he said, and he at once went to the door to call a servant, and give an order for refreshments. David scarcely ever rang the bell when he wanted anything. Somehow it made him feel ashamed. All his ancestors had had neither bells nor servants to answer them ; and David, who himself in his youthful days had fetched the water from the well, collected wood for the fires, and had even lit them, and had carried his father's dinner in a basin to the pit bank, could not now bring himself to ring the bell : so he asked for everything he wanted, as on this occasion.

David and Keziah talked on.

"What do you think brought on this last illness of grandmother's ?" asked Keziah.

"Well," replied David, "it's what I hardly like to speak of."

"You mean my father's visit ; I can see you do."

"Well, you see, there was a great quarrel between Jubal and his father, and we had to carry her to bed that night, and she never got up again. We all thought she would be better. Not one of us expected the end."

Death never is expected. It always comes with a shock, let it come when and how it may.

Speaking of Jubal's quarrel with his father made David wonder where he was now, and he asked Keziah if she knew.

She said she thought he had gone out.

But Jubal was not gone out. He had waited on the dark landing till he had seen his uncle and the doctor pass out ; he had then re-entered the room they had just quitted, and locked the door behind him.

A light was burning there. The fire was going out. The ashes subsided as Jubal entered, with a sound that made him start and look towards the bed. He could see nothing there but the form under a white sheet. Yet he could not keep his eyes off it.

Jubal carried in his hand the scrap of paper with nothing on it which his uncle had thrown down ; and he began directly to search over his

grandmother's possessions, to find, if possible, one like it, with something on it. After listening to her dying words, he believed firmly that she had had in her possession some paper that was capable of injuring his father, perhaps even of ruining him. So long had he kept his mind in the same attitude that he was on the alert even at a deathbed to seize upon anything that might tell against his father.

He found the sewn-up key in his grandmother's dress-pocket, and, as a matter of course, the box it fitted. His eyes fell upon the money Keziah had placed there, and he laughed scornfully. "Even she must hoard something up," he thought to himself.

He locked the box again, and replaced the key. The paltry gold was not what he was looking for.

All the time Jubal was looking about, he was listening, to make sure that no one was coming. He need not have troubled himself. People don't usually come into a room where a corpse lies, especially one not yet cold, unless they have some strong reason for it. Jubal examined every article in the box that poor Mrs. Rimmon had gone to service with, and found nothing. There was nowhere left to search, except the bed.

He felt a natural revulsion from this. But his purpose was strong ; and he thought to himself, "She has it about her, no doubt ;" and he stealthily took hold of the sheet. At the same moment the ashes moved in the grate once more. Jubal started. But the very act of starting removed the linen-sheet from the dead face beneath it ; and to his horror, the eyes stared at him, stony, and ghastly and awful.

Jubal conquered his fear, and passed his hand under the pillow—there was only one now—the other lay by the side of the bed. He felt nothing.

He turned the sheet a little lower down, and with a feeling of horror, which he never forgot as long as he lived, he passed his hand over the chest of the corpse.

Yes, there was some paper there. It was blue paper. He drew it out.

It was like the paper she had given to David, only there was writing on it. Jubal at once placed it in his pocket, and covered the corpse as it had been, and then left the room, glancing involuntarily back as he quitted it, at the still white form beneath the sheet.

This had been a great undertaking for Jubal, who had never seen a corpse before.

He now came downstairs, without having read the paper. He had no courage left for that.

He joined his uncle and Keziah, who were having tea.

Keziah did not look at him when he came in. She would have liked to do so, but she could not. Her eyes would not raise themselves.

She drank her tea in silence, and then said faintly, she would go to bed, for she must go back early the next morning, and she was very tired.

"Ah, what a pity now, there is no bed aired ready," said David. Then his face suddenly brightened. "But that doesn't matter, of course. You will go to sleep at Mrs. Towers's won't you?"

"I suppose I had better" replied Keziah, resignedly.

"Why, of couse," said David, "she'll be so glad to see you. I don't think she looks very well. Worried."

"I think I will go now," said Keziah. "I will come in here to-morrow morning, to say good-bye to you."

CHAPTER XXIX

WRONGS WITHOUT REMEDIES.

IT had been silently understood that there should be no communication between The Chestnuts and The Hollies. This was rather unfortunate in some respects. It deprived David of a great comfort, and it set the neighbourhood talking more and more about Maud. It was said in Bowdon now, that this strange young lady had brought home a new toy in the shape of a husband, and the gossips speculated freely on the length of time that might elapse before this toy should be thrown on one side. Remarks of this nature had even met Maud's ears, and she treated them with the same scorn we have formerly noticed in her.

The sudden appearance of Keziah at her house was a downright shock. Perhaps there was no one in the world Maud loved like Keziah. When the maid took in her name, Maud fairly rushed out in her great joy. Nobody had informed Maud of Mrs. Rimmon's illness. She knew no reason, therefore, for Keziah's coming.

"Oh, Kizzy!" broke out Maud, rapturously. "I had begun to think we should never meet. It is such a long time." And with exactly her old manner, she pulled her friend by the arm, and made her go quickly upstairs.

"Is your husband at home?" asked Keziah, whose state of mind made her nervous in prospect of seeing fresh faces.

"Oh," replied Maud, with a light laugh, "he is congenially occupied in studying surgery."

Maud led Keziah into the room she had occupied when she had lived there; and banging the door to, took her friend by the shoulders, and said—

"This room has always been kept ready for you, Keziah; so I have thought of you more than you seem to have thought of me."

"I have thought of you enough, I am sure, Maud, for it has been every day."

While she spoke, Maud was looking at Keziah. The flush that had come into her face at sight of Maud had died out, and she was quite shocked at the alteration.

"Why, Kizzy," she said, "what have you been doing with yourself?"

Keziah at these words burst out crying. Maud began to take off her things in spite of her, and put a light to the fire, that was always kept laid.

"Oh, it's too warm for a fire," urged Keziah; "don't light it."

"I tell you what," replied Maud, "you are shivering like an aspen, and you are as cold as you can be."

"Poor grandmamma has just died," said Keziah, as if to explain.

"Your grandmamma just dead!" exclaimed Maud, as if she thought she had not heard aright.

"Yes, she died to-night. Uncle David telegraphed for me and I came."

"Why didn't your uncle send for me, I wonder?" said Maud.

"You could hardly expect him to send for you," said Keziah deprecatingly.

A pained look passed over Maud's face.

"Kizzy, you have grown much thinner," she said, after a moment's silence. "Don't be reticent with your old friend. You are not happy, Kizzy."

"Happy!" replied Keziah, with the saddest of smiles, as if the word were ridiculous in connection with her. "I never expected to be happy. I only hoped to be at peace, and that has been denied me; for what if all should prove useless, and the struggle be in vain? Maud, the worst is, I feel now that I have done wrong to marry my cousin. I cannot redeem my old love by degrading myself. Oh! Maud, it's an endless struggle not to sink low, oh, so low, with nothing but degrading influences round you. What have I done," she cried impetuously, bursting into tears "to have my life blighted and cursed as it seems to be?"

"My good Kizzy," said Maud impressively, "I prophesy that happiness will come to you in the end, as I know the purity of your heart and motives. I cannot see how ; but happiness will come to you. The worst things you have ever done would be called virtue in another ; and if in some things you have been mistaken, that has not been your fault, and I have faith to believe it shall not be your misfortune in the end. I wish I had as much hope for myself, Kizzy."

"Are you unhappy ?" inquired Keziah with open eyes.

"My case is more hopeless than yours."

Keziah's gentle heart, ever ready to sympathise with others, was moved at once by the words, and the look which accompanied them. "Do tell me all about it," she said, touching her friend's hand caressingly.

"My case is summed up in a fairy tale I once read," she replied, in a tone of painful raillery against herself. "It was about a discontented little girl, who was always longing for a nugget of gold that was fixed in a goblin's doorpost ; and one day the goblin gave it to her. When she got it, all the bright gold turned dim, and it struck her cold ; and she could not get rid of it. She begged the goblin to take it back, and he refused."

"Oh, Maud," said Kizzy imploringly, "don't talk in that bitter tone. What do you mean ?"

"My dear Kizzy," said Mrs. Towers more calmly, and yet with a cynical edge to her voice, "I have the gratification of knowing and feeling hourly that my husband is not happy with me ; and nothing I can do makes a difference."

"Oh, Maud," cried Keziah energetically, "do not rest night or day till you have made him tell the reason, unless it be, as I really think, a morbid fancy of yours."

"No, no," replied Maud decisively, "he is not happy with me. But that is not all : he has some secret he is keeping from me. He asks me for large sums of money, and never tells me where it goes, and he behaves so peculiarly about it all."

"But he must have money, you know."

"Yes, and isn't he welcome to every penny I have ? It is the mystery that I dislike."

Keziah could not think of any answer ; but she put her arm round her friend caressingly, and, raising her sweet face, with the rapt look of a saint upon it, said—

"Maud, I think we can bear to live and struggle to do right, if

anyone loves us truly. It seems like a promise that Heaven is not all a delusion ; and I love you truly, Maud."

"You are a blessed comforting angel," said her friend, embracing her. "Heaven doesn't seem to be a delusion, when I look in your face."

"Oh, you don't know how wicked I feel sometimes. I have terrible thoughts often."

Maud shook her head incredulously, and then as if to throw off the subject which was painful to her, she said lightly, "Who do you think is staying with me now?"

"I can have no idea."

"Laura Saltring. Isn't that a surprise? She's such a nice little girl, or rather big girl, for she has grown as tall as I am, and is so very pretty."

"Laura Saltring!" said Mrs. Hackbit. A sort of cloud passed over Keziah's heart, for she remembered that Laura had not been kind to her, and she longed to have her friend all to herself this one night, as she must return home early the next day.

At this moment a gong sounded. "Ah," said Maud, "that's to summon us to coffee. But you must have a mutton-chop. I am sure you must need it."

Keziah, after a vain protest that she needed nothing, was compelled to yield ; and after Maud had given her orders, the two went together, as they had so often done, into Maud's favourite sitting-room.

On one of the many luxurious chairs, a young lady was sitting, whom Keziah would scarcely have recognised as Laura Saltring so lovely had she become, and so grown-up. Her long, light hair, worn, when we last saw her, in ringlets, was now coiled low on her neck, and the shape of her face was better seen. There was something in Laura's look that reminded Keziah forcibly of a picture she had seen of Lady Hamilton. She was wearing a dark-blue dress which fitted her beautifully, showing the outline of a most perfect figure. Laura was not surprised to see Keziah, for she had asked one of the servants directly, "Who had come?" She took care to keep herself informed upon most subjects that interested her. Keziah, who had never liked her, now felt a bitter antipathy to her which she could scarcely have explained, and her greeting was most cold and stiff. Laura noted it, and smiled. Keziah saw the smile, and noted that.

This greeting was just over when Tom Towers came in. There was a faint flush on his cheek, and he looked painfully thin. He strode into the room in a nervous fashion, glancing from one end of the room to the

other in an objectless way, and touching Keziah's hand so lightly that she would not have been sure that he had touched it at all, had it not left hers cold.

Laura watched the greeting with evident interest. Maud did not ; she was pouring out coffee, and uncovering the dainty chop which had been cooked for Keziah.

Towers offered no remark after this simple greeting, and Laura, who had felt herself snubbed, was likewise dumb. Keziah, to whom the silence was positively painful, asked Mr. Towers how his uncle and aunts were. He answered, with an effort, that he thought they were as usual. And again silence fell on the company.

Maud brought Tom his coffee. As he took it, he said to her in a low tone, "You must excuse me a little time, Maud ; I want to go out."

"But you forget how late it is," said Maud, fixing her great glowing eyes upon him. "Where can you want to go?"

"I can't tell you, Maud," he replied, his eyes moving uneasily from one object to another, a habit he appeared to have contracted since their marriage, and which was highly offensive to Maud.

"At least," went on Maud, "you may tell your wife where you are going."

To which he replied, "If you have no confidence in me, why don't you tell me to go ? Tell me, and I will go, and for ever, and cease to trouble you."

Maud moved away with a quiet dignity, into which a good deal of scorn appeared to enter.

This conversation was carried on in tones inaudible to the visitors. But Keziah noticed that something was wrong, and instinctively looked towards Laura to see if she noticed it. That demure personage had her eyes fixed on her coffee, and was mechanically stirring it with her spoon ; but nothing had been lost upon her .

Tom Towers got up and went out. Poor Maud tried to look as if nothing were wrong, and, after drinking some coffee, said to Laura, "I want you to be very kind to us to-night, and not mind our leaving you, as Keziah and I have much to talk of, and very little time."

"I will go to my room," said Laura, rising at once.

"You need not do that," said Maud. "We are going ourselves ; we have no wish to banish you."

"But I should prefer to go to bed now," said Laura ; "so I wish you good night."

"Let us talk with the light out," suggested Keziah, when Laura had gone.

"But we shall be quite in the dark if we do," rejoined Maud. "It isn't like winter, when we have the firelight."

"But it's moonlight outside. Let us draw the blinds up."

Maud assented, and the moonlight streamed in.

They sat together and talked over their changed lives till they were startled by hearing a distant clock strike one.

"There's Tom coming in," Maud said, indicating the gate; "and there's somebody with him."

That somebody turned, and the moonlight falling on his face, Keziah gave a start, and gripped Maud by the arm, and pointed.

"Well?" said Maud, in a low voice. "Of course he must be meeting some one, or else why should he want to go out?"

"Whom do you suppose it is?" said Keziah huskily.

"I don't know."

"My husband's clerk," said Keziah; "a man I utterly distrust."

The two girls held each other's hands, and stood transfixed at the window.

While they looked, they heard a sound in the room above them. It was like the closing of a window. Both the figures at the gate looked up, and moved into the shade.

"What could that be?" said Keziah.

"It sounded like Laura's window," replied Maud. "She often opens the window at night; she likes to get the air."

"Nonsense," said Keziah. "How can you be so blind, Maud? My advice to you is, don't trust Laura, and get her out of the house as soon as you can. She is not safe. Mark my words."

"Oh, Keziah, fancy not trusting a child of Mr. Saltring. Laura is vain, but that is her worst fault."

"Are children to be judged by their parents?" asked Keziah bitterly. "Do you judge me by mine?"

"Of course not. There's Tom come in. Do not appear to have seen him. Oh, Kizzy, my dear friend," she said, putting her hot cheek against Keziah's for a moment, "I would give anything in the world to be free again."

Towers did not come into the room; he went upstairs; and Maud, and Keziah stayed downstairs until daylight streamed in upon them, when Keziah went upstairs to get ready for her journey homeward.

CHAPTER XXX.

INGRATITUDE.

SIX WEEKS previous to this, the birth of twin boys had delighted the Rev. Brougham Banner beyond description ; and he solemnly remarked to his vicar, who was congratulating him, "that these two should be laid upon the altar of the Church." This was metaphorical ; but, as we have seen, Mr. Banner liked metaphor.

About a week after the joyful event, Mrs. Layton paid a visit to the curate's wife, bringing with her some flowers. Mr. Banner's one servant, on opening the door, grinned as only Langtonian servants could grin, and asked her to step inside, remarking—

"The master's mar's 'ere, and 'is par too ; they've just comed, mum, and will you step hupstairs ?"

Mrs. Layton on hearing of the "mar" and "par," wished herself elsewhere ; but there seemed to be no help for it ; she had come and she must go through with it.

The advent of Mr. and Mrs. Banner, senior, was as little appreciated by their son as by Mrs. Layton ; for Brougham chose to keep carefully in the background the unrepresentable parents, who by dint of the monotonous weighing of tea and sugar, and the unstringing of farthing dips, and the distribution of ha'p'orths of sweets to the infant population of the neighbourhood where they lived, had scraped together the funds by virtue of which the feet of their son found a place beneath every rich man's table. Mr. and Mrs. Banner, senior, had often expressed a wish to visit their son, since, as they explained in their letters, in awful writing and worse spelling, "they had got a very good yung mon in the shop, as was to be trusted to look after the bisness while they had a holaday."

Their dutiful son had always raised some objection to this scheme, and hitherto successfully. But on hearing of the birth of two grandchildren, the parental ardour broke forth, and determined to give "Bruey" a pleasant surprise. However, when the curate, from his wife's sitting-room upstairs, heard the well-known brogue of his father in the hall, the colour mounted to his reverend countenance, and fixed itself there.

"We wonner make a nize," said a voice from below ; and four feet began to be heard mounting the stairs. The first to appear on the landing above was a little man, bald, grey, ruddy, and rather corpulent

withal. He wore a light suit of tweed, and a home-made shirt. Round his throat was a check handkerchief. With another of the same pattern he was mopping his head, while he beamed benevolence on his discomfited son and heir, who stood before him in a state of anguish not to be described.

"By gom, Bruey," said the parent, stretching out his hand, "I congratulate yer, I do. The missis and me has brought yer a bit o' bacon, and brought your missis some new-laid heggs from our own hins—them as you used to be so fond of, you know, Bruey;" and as he spoke, his comely wife reached his side, her shawl bulging out in a fashion that suggested eggs and bacon. She held up a fat and rosy face to be kissed, and Brougham obediently kissed her.

"Bless his soul," said the mother admiringly, "how well he looks; an' I've baked him a cake, I have—one as he used ter like, an' it's in the hankercher, it is. What an yer done with the hankercher?" she asked, nudging her husband.

"By gom," answered the little man, "if I havener left it at the station."

The mother's face grew grave in a moment, and the "Oh!" that broke from her was indeed pathetic.

"That's a pretty pass, that is," she said; "an' after I've a been an' sat up to bake it after I'd minded the shop, an' I said as how Bruey 'ud like a bit o' cake like he used ter have when he was a' wom."

"Never mind about the cake, mother," said Brougham, at his wit's end what to do. "Come and see Martha."

"Ah! we'll go and see Marther," replied the two; and they trotted along to the room where Martha was, with a step as heavy as their honest hearts were light.

They had scarcely entered the room when Mrs. Layton's knock was heard, and she was quickly announced, and entered the room; and before the curate could say anything, his father had said in no dulcet tones—

"A nee'bour, I suppose; come in, mum, and sit yer down."

Mrs. Layton at once recognized him as the "par" alluded to by the girl.

"How d'e do, Mrs. Layton," said the curate. "Theser are—aw—some friends from the country."

Mrs. Layton smiled.

"Now, listen to him," said the parent, again breaking in; "he always liked his joke, he did. Why, when he wor a little lad, a-going to the Wisleyan day school, he——"

Brougham interrupted him precipitately at this point, and asked Mrs.

Layton if she would go down to the drawing-room, and the babies should be brought to be shown to her.

"Oh, lor', she needn't be for mindin' us," broke in the mother. "We're only his father and mother."

The curate looked despairingly round. It had all come out ; there was no help for it.

"Look 'ere what we've gone and brought him," went on the mother, indicating the bacon, wrapped in check, "an' these eggs 'ere are for his missis there ;" and she indicated with her forefinger a basket of beautiful brown eggs. "I made 'im a cake, too ; but him went and left it at the railroad, he did."

Mrs. Layton had expected nothing so bad as this, and felt extremely uncomfortable. She therefore expressed her intention of calling some other time, and prepared to cut her visit short.

"Would yer like a rasher or two to take with yer ? It's 'ome-cured, and would be nice for yer tea," said the old man, hospitably.

Mrs. Layton made no reply, but bowed slightly, and left the room.

When she was gone, the curate raised his hands to his head, and said in an agonised tone—

"You've ruined me ; you've ruined me."

The worthy couple were absolutely aghast at this, and were tempted to believe that their Bruey had taken leave of his senses.

"How could you offer a lady bacon !"

"It would be a treat for anybody," said the old lady, bridling, "that it would, there ; I thought she were a friend on yourn."

The curate covered his face with his hands, and cried in a wailing tone—

"What did you educate me at all for, if you meant to humble me like this ? You ought to have kept away."

The old people looked at each other, and the father said—

"All right, Bruey ;" this in a voice that quavered "We wunner come any more—we didn't know as 'ow——" but here he broke down, and mopped his eyes vigorously with his check handkerchief.

"Let us kiss the babes first," said the old woman, her face as white now as it had been ruddy on her entrance.

The mother of the babies here spoke for the first time—

"Oh, Brougham, how can you ?" she said ; and, taking a hand of each of the old people, she added, in the most persuasive tone, "Please, don't go. He doesn't know what he has been saying, and I

like you so much ;" and here Mrs. Banner, junior, broke down and began to cry.

But the old people were resolved. They had seen the truth. They were not to be entreated now.

"Come, missis," said the father, taking her trembling hand, "let us go wom." And the old couple passed out of the room and of the house, leaving behind them, on a chair of the sitting-room, the home-fed bacon and the basket of eggs, silent testimony to their thoughtful care for an ungrateful son.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BREAKERS AHEAD.

WHEN Keziah reached home from Manchester, she found her lord in no amiable mood. He scarcely greeted her. Wilson, too, looked morose, and could hardly be got to look up at her mistress.

"Where are the children?" Keziah asked her.

"Oh, m'm," began Wilson, viciously fingering the hem of her apron, and rubbing her foot about on the ground, "I can hardly tell you, indeed I can't, such a shame as it is, such a burning shame."

"What is the matter? Speak directly," said Keziah, growing alarmed and exasperated; "I cannot be kept like this."

"It's the master," said Wilson, looking up for the first time, and with burning eyes.

"What about the master?" said Keziah, growing desperate.

"He's beaten Bertram," answered Wilson.

Keziah echoed, "Beaten Bertram? Oh, Wilson, whatever did he beat the child for? Let us go to him at once. When did he beat him? Whatever had he been doing?" As she said these last few sentences, she was walking rapidly upstairs.

"This morning he beat him. And what for? You may well ask, what for? I don't know. He doesn't know himself—the brute," she added involuntarily; "and Bertarm's the best child that ever breathed. His only fault is being too good for them as aren't no good themselves, and as don't understand him, and don't love him—the dear lamb!" she concluded, in a tone that suggested abuse of Hackbit, rather than tenderness towards the child.

In the nursery they found Bertram lying on his face on the floor, fast asleep, his little hands, each clutching a wrist, fixed round his head, and the poor little arms red and wealed.

"This is downright disgraceful," said Keziah, looking at the child. "Why did you let him go to sleep there, Wilson?" she added, looking at the nurse.

"The dear lamb would go there, and he wouldn't let nobody go near him when he'd been beat."

Master Hackbit put in his word at this moment, by crowing lustily from the other end of the nursery. Keziah could scarcely notice him, she was so wounded. She knelt down by the sleeping child, and stroked his cheek ever so gently. He started awake with a scream, but he smiled when he saw who it was, and said with a sob, "Mother."

Keziah took him in her arms, and covered his hands, and his arms, and his tear-stained face with kisses. It seemed to her that this was the signal of open war between herself and her husband. She had felt almost ever since their marriage that Hackbit had not really taken kindly to her adopted child; but he had never ill-used him till now. She had never thought he would; and, indeed, the child was not of a nature to provoke ill-treatment, being gentle, obedient, and affectionate. Bertram had been whipped by no one hitherto; and no one but Hackbit had ever made a complaint against him; even he could only express his disfavour in general terms, and could particularise no fault the child had committed. As Keziah looked at the poor little arms, and the pretty white neck, with the livid raised lines upon them, she thought indignantly that a really wicked child should never be whipped so much as this. Keziah was Keziah still, though trouble had changed her face, and even her manner somewhat. So with a majestic step, she carried the child out of the room, down the stairs, through the dining-room, into the offices, into which there was a private door of communication.

Her husband was sorting papers, and marking them at a table.

"Mr. Hackbit," said Keziah, in an ominous tone, "I should like to speak to you."

He had expected Keziah to be angry; but he had scarcely expected her to beard him in his den; so not being prepared, he was perhaps all the more ruffled.

He faced round in his chair—which had a movable screw, and could face anyway—and remarked with a characteristic sneer that he would be glad if she would not interrupt him when he was engaged in business.

Keziah's old fiery temper burst forth, in spite of the good resolves she had formed.

"Business or not, you shall hear what I have to say. You're a dastardly coward."

Hackbit's face worked with rage. He was at his wit's end how to reply in words crushing enough.

Seeing that he hesitated, Keziah went on, "I repeat my words, Mr. Hackbit ; you are a dastardly coward. Look at this poor child."

Hackbit had found his tongue. "Walk out of this office," he said, pointing steadily at the door with his forefinger.

"I shall do nothing of the sort," replied Keziah, deadly white, but quite firm. "The worst child in the world doesn't merit marks like these ; and Bertram is one of the best children that ever lived."

"Keziah," thundered Hackbit, in a terrific passion, "have you brought that child here to talk so before him, to teach him to defy me ?"

"I have brought him," retorted Keziah, "that he may see and hear that his mother, at least, has no part in this shameful wrong that has been done him."

Hackbit, raging violently, found no words to express himself in. It is only those who are in the right that can give true scorn spontaneously. How Joshua Rimmon would have rejoiced, could he have seen his nephew receiving a taste of the anger his daughter had so frequently poured out upon himself.

Hackbit was gnawing his lower lip, and breaking up a quill-pen, but speechless.

"I have one more thing to say," resumed Keziah. "It shall be the worse for you, if you touch this child again," and with this she quitted the office.

When she had gone, a volley of curses broke from her husband, which would not get uttered while she was there ; and while he allowed his passion to draw itself upon his countenance, the ever-smiling face of Mr. Rimpler gazed at him from an outer window. Mr. Rimpler had returned from Manchester, just in time to witness Keziah's exit and Hackbit's rage.

Entering the office, Rimpler greeted Hackbit as if he had seen nothing ; then affecting suddenly to discover something wrong in Hackbit's countenance, he asked him if anything had gone wrong.

"D— you, replied Hackbit ; "what's it got to do with you ?"

"Oh, nothing," said Rimpler, sniffling, indifferently. "Only ever since

I came I have expected you to be in trouble, and have been in a position to throw some light upon it."

Hackbit fixed his eyes keenly upon his clerk, and asked him what he was talking about.

"If you don't know," replied Mr. Rimpler, unflinchingly, "I don't see why I should take the trouble to inform you."

"Do you think I keep you to pry into my affairs?" returned Hackbit.

"Not precisely," said Mr. Rimpler, smiling complacently.

"I will explain your duties to you, as you seem to have forgotten them. I engaged you to be in this office from ten till four, minus dinner-time. Yesterday you absented yourself, without any permission from me."

"I beg your pardon; I told you I was going."

"I certainly never understood you," said Hackbit. "Besides," he added wrathfully, "it's not your place to tell me you are going out."

If Hackbit had had less on his mind at this moment, his clerk would have come off worse. As it was, he walked away at this point; and Rimpler heard him shortly afterwards bang the hall door, and saw him pass the office window, and go up the street in the direction of his father-in-law's.

"Wonder what he's going to do," thought Rimpler, with a very cunning light in his eyes. And he went to his papers and sat down in front of them, but did not work.

"Ah," thought he to himself, "of all the ways of making money, there's none so good as getting into a man's confidence in spite of him. Silence is always up in the market, and will fetch its price when everything else is down."

Mr. Rimpler at this moment happening to look through the window, for no particular reason, saw a lady advancing with mincing steps towards the office-entrance. Her appearance evidently caused him great amusement, for he fairly shook with laughter, though no sound was emitted by him.

"A client, I suppose," he thought. "I must compose my countenance. Plenty of cheek, though," he thought, as the door opened without a knock.

Mr. Rimpler bowed.

"Oh," said the lady, "I thought my nephew was here. I came to see him." This was extraordinary, as Miss Dorcas had seen him pass Mr. Rimmon's house a few minutes before, going in an opposite direction.

"If it is a matter of business, perhaps I can be of service to you," blandly replied Mr. Rimpler, offering a chair.

"Well, it isn't exactly business," said Miss Dorcas, simpering. "Thomas promised to show me his new office ; and I just dropped in to see if it would be convenient this morning."

"If that is all you require, Madam, I shall have great pleasure in showing you the offices."

"Thank you, Mr. — I don't know your name."

"Rimpler," said the clerk ; and he began to show Miss Dorcas the offices in the most affable manner imaginable.

"Do you know these parts much, Mr. Rimpler?" Miss Dorcas inquired.

"Not much ; but I've not the pleasure of knowing what to call you."

"My name is Dorcas Rimmon."

"Mrs. or Miss?" asked Mr. Rimpler, who knew the answer perfectly well by her look.

"Miss," Dorcas acknowledged, blushing faintly.

"Ah," said Mr. Rimpler, "I'm glad to hear that."

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Miss Dorcas, smiling sweetly upon the clerk.

"Oh, nothing, except that it's agreeable now and then to find that all the handsome women have not been snapped up, and that there are still some left to be won by those whom fortune may favour. I suppose you knew Mrs. Hackbit before she was married?" went on Mr. Rimpler. "Charming person!"

"Know her!" replied Miss Dorcas, clouding over directly. "I should think I do know her ; but I don't think her charming."

Mr. Rimpler had thrown out a feeler, and discovered what ground he was on ; and continued to ply his new acquaintance with questions.

"Well, now," he went on, "I'm surprised that you don't think she's charming. Now, my experience goes to prove that people like Mrs. Hackbit get a hundred chances of marrying, but refuse all for the man they love."

"She has had lots of lovers, but only two offers that I know of," burst forth Miss Dorcas. Mr. Rimpler thought he had never had such easy work before. And the lady, being on this subject, could not refrain from saying that Keziah had been engaged to somebody else, and had broken with him, and then married her cousin out of spite.

"So I suppose," said Mr. Rimpler, "the gentleman she forsook married someone else out of spite?"

"No, he didn't," answered Miss Dorcas ; "he's in Leamington now."

Mr. Rimpler referred for a moment to a note-book he had in his hand.

"You're not going to take down what I say?" said Miss Dorcas, alarmed.

"I was only referring," replied Mr. Rimpler, "to see what time I expect a client here to-day ; for I fear the time must be near."

"Oh, and I must go," said Miss Dorcas, all in a flutter.

This was what Mr. Rimpler wanted, for he had extracted enough out of her for the time, and he did not desire that anyone should come and find them together, a consideration which appeared to be of no moment whatever to the lady. As Dorcas held out her hand to the clerk by way of taking leave, he touched it with the greatest respect, remarking as he did so that he esteemed it a most fortunate chance which had given him the pleasure of this chat with her, and that he hoped they should meet again.

"Perhaps you will come and see me?" said Miss Dorcas, taking the bait instantly.

"I should much like to do so," replied Mr. Rimpler gravely, "if an opportunity occurs." And he decided mentally to make an opportunity.

Dorcas was about to leave through the door she had entered by. But it occurred to her that, for the sake of keeping up appearances, it might be as well to go into the house and see Keziah. So she passed into the house, and went to the nursery, where she supposed Keziah would be.

Keziah looked up wearily as she entered, and said, "Well, aunt?" in a tone that might mean anything.

Noticing a travelling-bag on the nursery table, Dorcas asked Keziah who was going away.

"Nobody," replied Keziah. "I have just come back from Manchester."

"I never knew you'd been there," said Miss Dorcas, offended instantly.

"Uncle David telegraphed for me," continued Keziah, in the tone she had used at first. "Poor grandmamma's dead."

"Well, I never knew such a nuisance," said Miss Dorcas after a brief pause. "I've just been and bought everything new ; and now to have to go in black—it's shameful ! Why couldn't she go and die before I bought my things, or else wait till I have to buy the winter ones?"

A snort from Wilson caught Miss Rimmon's attention at this point, and she said, in a manner meant to be satirical, "Has that woman got a cold in her head?"

"No, ma'am, thank you," said Wilson, speaking for herself, "I have not a cold in my head. But I'd rather have ten million colds in my head

than have what some people seem to have in theirs, and in their hearts, too, for that matter."

The full weight of this remark was lost on Miss Dorcas, owing to her not understanding it. But she knew that it was meant to be insulting; and she said to Keziah that she wondered how she could keep such a creature as that Wilson.

"I know my own business without your interference," she replied.

"Well, you needn't be so snappish," retorted her aunt, who then added affably, "what a nice young man you have in the office now."

"Well, he's not very young," replied Keziah, smiling; "and as for his being nice, I don't think he's that either."

"Oh, it's always the way," said Miss Dorcas; "if ever I like anybody, you always turn against them."

"You must have got up a liking for him pretty soon," was Keziah's amused comment; "you can't have seen him many times."

"Once is quite enough to teach us to like some people," asserted Miss Dorcas.

Had she known what Mr. Rimpler was thinking about her at this moment, she might have spared some of her eulogiums on him; for he was thinking, "Of all the fools I ever knew in my life, that woman is the biggest."

CHAPTER XXXII.

A SUBTLE WORKMAN.

JOSHUA RIMMON was placed in a most awkward position by his mother's death, following as it did upon his quarrel with his brother. David had been too much hurt to let him know of his mother's illness; but decency demanded that he should be informed of her death, and be invited to her funeral, as her eldest son.

Joshua's first feeling on reading this news, which arrived the same morning that Keziah returned to Jumley, was one of downright relief that his brother had spared his reputation so far as to ask him to the funeral; and for appearance' sake he resolved to go to Manchester, and swallow that bitter draught, as he had done many another for the same reason.

Having decided what to do, Mr. Rimmon announced the death to his wife in a manner quite in character.

"Ann," he said, addressing her, "put the blinds down."

That meek person, having once looked into his face, saw reason for not asking him any question, and concluded in her own mind that his mother was dead. And having put the blinds down, and seen her lord off the premises, she went down to Keziah.

"Strange," she thought, as she approached the house, "these blinds are not down;" and in truth it had never occurred to Keziah to have them put down.

On her entrance, Keziah at once said to her mother, "I suppose Uncle David has sent you word about poor grandmamma."

"Why, no, my dear," replied Mrs. Rimmon. "At least he has, I think," she corrected herself. "Your father told me to put the blinds down. Poor soul! It's a happy release for her, I should think. When we get old," she went on, "and we find one thing after another turn out nothing, and all the ways leading to nowhere, we begin to look for death, and to want it."

Keziah begged her mother to stay with her the remainder of the day; but she could not do that, Mr. Rimmon's dinner was too all-important.

Keziah did not go down to a meal that day. She sat and sewed in the nursery. She thought the hours would never wear away, and it would never be dark. She had never even told her husband that their grandmother was dead.

Ten o'clock; Wilson went down to her supper. Eleven o'clock; Wilson went to bed. And still Keziah sat in the nursery and sewed. Twelve o'clock came; and some time after it had struck, Keziah went outside the nursery door and listened over the banisters. She could hear her husband's voice and that of Mr. Rimpler.

At last she heard her husband's voice rise in a strange manner, sounding quite unlike his usual voice. She went a few steps downstairs and listened again. Her blood froze. She could not doubt it now. Her husband was drunk.

Hardly knowing what she did, she went down and opened the dining-room door. Yes; she was not mistaken. There sat the lawyer and his clerk, with an empty bottle between them. Hackbit was uncorking another. Both men were highly excited.

Sick at heart, Keziah went out. Neither of them had noticed her. "Oh," she thought, "what a horrible future begins for me this night." And she stole upstairs, and waited till the grey dawn broke; and then and not till then, Hackbit with unsteady footsteps mounted the stairs.

When Hackbit's bedroom door had shut behind him, Mr. Rimpler mounted. His step was not at all unsteady. Emphatically Mr. Rimpler was not drunk, unless it were with pleasure at the success of his own mode of procedure. When inside his bedroom he placed his candle upon the dressing-table, sat down in front of it and contemplated himself in the glass, and looked highly satisfied with his appearance.

"There's a face," he said to himself, "that won't reflect the heart even when we are by ourselves. A pattern face, that won't even trust me." And having treated himself to this piece of amusement, Mr. Rimpler took out his note-books and arranged them in front of him. They were beautifully kept, on a perfect system, so that Mr. Rimpler had no difficulty at all in turning to any particular thing.

"R, S, T," he said to himself, turning the leaves of one pocket-book. He stopped at T, and conned his notes. "Towers: strictly non-committal. Wasn't to be led away by my pretending to know. Must lay a trap for Heinrich. Must have seen Towers when I was a medical student in Germany, or some one else vastly like him." And here Silas chuckled to himself as he thought that only he and his sole confidant, namely himself, knew anything about his ever having been a medical student. In fact, there were quite enough reasons for his not wishing it to be known.

Whatever Mr. Rimpler's game might be, he understood it. If he did confidential work for people, and these people chose for some reason to keep him in the dark, even while he was acting for them, he saw at once something worth his sifting, and sifted it; and at this present moment, he was the secret agent of many respectable people who had things to keep dark. Among them was a certain Herr Heinrich, occupying a very responsible position in London, from whom he had the order to receive £100 from Towers, on the day we have seen him in Manchester. Mr. Rimpler therefore felt it was to his interest to get to understand the why and the wherefore of this transaction between Heinrich and Towers, and he tried what he termed "Plan No. 1," that is, he pretended to know all about the matter, and endeavoured to lead Towers on into stating the case. Towers, as the extract above given shows, had not fallen into the trap. Had it not been for personal reasons, Mr. Rimpler would have proceeded on his next visit to young Towers, to assure him that he had met him in Germany. As Rimpler's knowing Towers would imply Towers' knowing Rimpler, and perhaps being informed of circumstances which had better not see the light, Mr. Rimpler chose not to play

this card. Besides, he could remember nothing against Towers in Germany.

Mr. Rimpler shut that note-book up, and looked for H in another book. Under the head of "Hackbit" was written—"Another man's agent for money-lending business. Must find out who that man is. Strongly suspect father-in-law." He added to this in pencil—"From what he let fall to-night when drunk, I am sure it is his father-in-law."

He closed the book, and said to himself, "What fools men are to drink. Hackbit's as close as anybody when he's sober. A man who does our work, Hackbit's and mine, should never drink. He daren't turn me away now; to-morrow I shall apply for more money."

Mr. Rimpler now put his light out, but did not begin to undress. It was one of his peculiarities that he could exist with very little sleep. When he had had two hours' rest, he felt as fresh as most men who have had six. But he always retired to his room at the same hours as the people he was with, and never mentioned the fact of his sleeping so short a time. It was a kind of religion with Mr. Rimpler to tell nothing he was not obliged to tell, however trivial it might seem; for he held that it was impossible to judge what things were or were not important. It was for this reason that Mr. Rimpler's light was put out, after he thought a reasonable time had elapsed. But having put the light out, Mr. Rimpler drew the blind up, and stationed himself comfortably by the window. This he had done every night since he had been an inmate of the house. He watched by way of occupation. Something might happen. In any case, his time was not wasted, for he could think; and perhaps this thinking was Mr. Rimpler's strongest point. The time most men spend in trivial actions, Mr. Rimpler spent in carefully thinking out his courses of action.

He was now in the possession of a handsome sum of money, all of it hush-money. He had been paid out of the last firm in which he had been a partner, and chose to come as clerk to Mr. Hackbit, though quite qualified to act on his own account as a solicitor. Mr. Rimpler speculated in situations, and up to the present was always on the winning side. So well had he managed his affairs, that *bonâ-fide* testimonials of the utmost value, from most respectable firms, were in his possession. When he should have fleeced Hackbit, he should have a testimonial from him, he thought.

The reader will judge that Mr. Rimpler had not failed to note Keziah's parting with Elworthy. He saw and took in the situation at once, and

perceived in it another chance for himself to make money. But he never plucked fruit till it was ripe ; and he decided within himself that this man whom he had seen with Mrs. Hackbit would certainly come again to the house ; he also decided that he would see him whenever he might come.

Dorcas had entered into and helped him in this part of his business. She had confirmed his suspicions. He had been highly amused by Hackbit's anger at his absenting himself without permission. But he never took a liberty of this kind until he had made his footing quite secure ; and he had not been three days in the establishment before his position with Hackbit was sure, though the latter knew nothing about it.

The most acute person in that house, in Rimpler's opinion, was Wilson ; and he accordingly guarded himself against her. His method was this : he was as rude as he could be to her on all occasions. He knew very well that, if he were polite to Wilson, her suspicion of him would be increased.

It may interest the reader to know something of the origin of so strange a person as Silas Rimpler. He was born and bred in no marble halls, but in a marine store-shop kept by his father in a certain low quarter of London ; and there Silas had passed his early years, and had seen his father grow rich.

And while Silas Rimpler watched, James Elworthy, moth-like, came to burn himself at his mistress's candle. In other words, the foolish fellow had come to look at the casket that held his lost treasure.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MADELINE.

ONE morning about the time of fruit harvest, Mrs. Saltring received a letter from Laura, on which Mr. Saltring made a running comment as he read it, thus :—

“So Jubal is really gone to the mills with his uncle,” was his first comment. “And old Mrs. Rimmon's dead ; and”—he read some more in silence, then looked at his wife, and remarked, “Well, if this doesn't beat all. First, Joshua Rimmon quarrels with his brother and Jubal, and vows never to speak to either of them again ; and after that he has the cheek to come to stay in the house, to go to the funeral,

and never open his mouth to Jubal the whole time, though they stood side by side over the open grave. I call it disgraceful."

"Oh, here's something interesting," he said, after reading another page. "David Rimmon has made a will in favour of Jubal, since his father has given him up, and Keziah is provided for."

"I can't make out how it is Laura knows all this," remarked Mrs. Saltring, "for she told us in your last letter, if you remember, that Mr. and Mrs. Towers never visited their next-door neighbours, and had no communication with them."

"Oh, she must meet Jubal," said the father, "and hear it from him ; what is more natural ?" And, truly, it did seem natural enough. But it would have surprised them if they had known that the Towerses never heard Laura mention Jubal's name except in the most indifferent manner, and had no idea that she met him anywhere.

"There's no more of importance in the letter," observed Mr. Saltring, "except that Laura is coming home in a day or two. Quite time she did. She has been there too long already. In my opinion, guests should always leave a house while the host is still pressing them to stop."

The time of gathering fruit was an especially festive one at the Saltrings'. The members of the household, with one accord, assembled in the orchard ; and the little folks carried out all their belongings and abandoned the nursery. All the children, and Mrs. Saltring herself, wore pretty print dresses ; and rugs and seats and small tables, needlework stands, and some light literature, all found a place under the loaded trees. The groom, and two or three little boys who came to help and to fill their stomachs and pockets, mounted the ladders placed under the trees, and the children of the house held the baskets. No meal was to be taken within doors to-day ; all were to abandon themselves to gipsy life. The baby, who could now run about, stood with a tiny toy basket under an apple-tree, and received a single apple, which he carried to the big basket and emptied solemnly, and then as solemnly returned for another. Mrs. Saltring's post was a vague one. She was there under a general pretence of keeping order, but in reality she plied her needle, and smiled on her offspring and enjoyed herself. When dinner-time came, every child helped to carry something out—either a plate or a glass or some other requisite, the spoons being reserved for baby to carry. A wooden kitchen-table was placed under a tree, and upon it dinner was laid. When Mr. Saltring arrived on the scene, everybody's spirits went up. The baby

insisted on having his high chair at papa's elbow, and having bits from papa's fork ; while his bigger brothers looked with some contempt upon this infantile proceeding. Harry and his big brother Ted, who has been only once before alluded to, patronised the whole company.

Dinner was nearly over, when Edmond happened to turn his head in the direction of the orchard gate. Leaning on it was a girl, dressed in black, and having a straw hat upon her head, totally untrimmed ; from under the hat masses of wavy light hair hung in a kind of disorder. Her great violet eyes stared at the food like those of a famished dog. She only stood there, and did not attempt to speak.

"Father," said Ted, "look at that girl."

Everybody looked. Mr. and Mrs. Saltring rose simultaneously, and went towards the gate. The girl appeared to wake up as they approached, and darted away like a wild thing.

"Go after her quick, Sam, do," said Mrs. Saltring. "She looked starving." And in very truth she did.

Mr. Saltring had not far to go before he overtook the girl, for she had sunk down in the narrow lane that had led her to the orchard, utterly unable to proceed farther. As Mr. Saltring approached her, she waved him back gently ; but he was not to be put off ; and Mrs. Saltring, who followed closely in her husband's wake, added her word—

"You look tired, my dear," she said, in her motherly manner. "Come and join us at the table ; take some refreshment."

The girl made no movement.

"You must come," Mrs. Saltring insisted ; "and you will be more able to go home when you have had something."

"Go home !" exclaimed the girl, with wide-open eyes. "I have no home. Go away, and let me die."

"Bless my heart alive," said Mr. Saltring, taking hold of her by main force, "then you are coming in." And he half led, half carried her, till he had placed her in the chair Mrs. Saltring had just quitted, while that lady began tempting her with food.

She could scarcely eat at all, and Mrs. Saltring could with difficulty refrain from crying as she saw how terribly wasted she was. The girl saw her sympathy, and, letting her head fall on her hands, began to weep convulsively.

"Oh !" she sobbed, "you're too kind ; you don't know who you're kind to ; let me go away."

Mrs. Saltring, by way of answer, put her arm round the girl's shoulder,

and laid her soft cheek against the pallid and wasted one of the stranger.

The girl continued to sob, and said, in broken accents, "Let me go. It's harder to starve when you've been fed again."

"But you shan't starve," said Mrs. Saltring. "Do you think we've no feeling? You're in trouble, my dear. You must stay with us until you can see your way to go back to your friends."

Mrs. Saltring spoke in this manner, for there was something in the girl's demeanour which bespoke her the gentlewoman in spite of her shabby dress.

"You must tell me your name, and all about yourself, just as if you had known me always."

They were quite alone, for Master Ted—"Mister" he much preferred being called, being a sixth form boy—had cleared everybody off the scene.

"I can't tell you now," said the girl. "Call me Madeline. I believe you are an angel. Is it all true? Oh, the things I have seen! What I have gone through! It makes me think I am dreaming now."

"The darkest hour comes before the dawn, my dear," said Mrs. Saltring. Looking up, she saw her husband coming through the orchard gate, with a cup of tea in his hand.

"Tea!" cried Madeline, looking up. "Oh, how I have longed for tea! In the barn last night I dreamed I had some." She drank it, hot as it was, and her face flushed, and she looked at Mrs. Saltring in a manner that caused that lady to start, and assume a far-away look, as if trying to recall something or somebody.

That night, while the poor wayfarer was comfortably lodged in Laura's empty room, and Mr. and Mrs. Saltring had retired for the night, the latter said to her husband—

"Tell me, Sam, whom does this girl remind you of?"

"It's puzzling in the extreme," he responded. "I can hardly believe it, and yet there is no doubt of it. She does remind me of Keziah's foster-baby."

"And me, too," said Mrs. Saltring. "What a strange thing!"

"How glad I am she came to our house!" observed Mr. Saltring. "If she had not had shelter this night, I fear it would have been her last. And what has God given us our home for, if not to shelter the wretched when they are sent to us?"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MR. RIMMON IS STUNG.

It was late in November, and Jumley lay overshadowed and hedged in by a murky cloak of cloud and fog. It was evening ; and Mr. Rimmon, seated in his own dining-room, with the curtains close drawn, and a Black Country fire burning, that is, a good big one, and a bright lamp upon the table, was not sensible of the discomfort without. A quantity of books lay upon the table, all of them new ; and in the flyleaf was posted a card on which was printed, "Jumley Wesleyan Sunday School : Round O Class."

Mr. Rimmon was engaged in writing names on these cards, and beneath the name the number of years the scholar had neither missed Sunday School nor been late. Any member of the Round O who had been one moment late during the year got no prize, and had to begin the reckoning over again from the following Round O meeting, which was considered an overpowering disgrace.

Now all the members of Mr. Rimmon's Bible Class were also Round O members of the Sunday School, and to these Mr. Rimmon himself gave the prizes. The Round O had first been started in Jumley in November. Therefore the same date as it recurred witnessed a Round O celebration, which consisted of a tea-drinking, at 4.30, in the Sunday School, to which any one was admitted on payment of one shilling ; and of a public meeting after tea, in the adjoining chapel, where many speeches were made on the subject of the Round O ; after which the prizes were distributed to the successful Round O-ists, usually by the minister of the chapel.

Mr. Rimmon was a Round O teacher, and had been so for eighteen years without missing, which was longer than anyone in Jumley ; and Mr. Rimmon was thinking about this fact as he wrote the names of the scholars in the prize-books.

While he was thus occupied, the minister of his congregation, the Rev. Wilson Gray, dropped in to ask a question in reference to the meeting which was to come off next day.

Mr. Rimmon rose to receive Mr. Gray in his most affable manner, and begged him to take the chair nearest the fire. The minister sat down, and asked after Mrs. Rimmon, who was not in the room.

"She will be here directly, and will be delighted to see you."

Mr. Gray, dressed in simple black, with a white tie, and a grey silky beard, cropped rather short, a pale sympathetic face, grey earnest eyes, and scanty grey hair, sat for a moment or two breathing rather heavily, and leaning wearily back in his chair.

"Ah, Mr. Gray," remarked Mr. Rimmon, "Jumley doesn't agree with your weak heart."

"Someone must be at Jumley," answered the minister with a patient smile, "and why not I?"

"But there are plenty of places, and plenty of ministers," rejoined Mr. Rimmon. "I am sure this place can't suit you."

"I scarcely think it a healthy place for anybody," said Mr. Gray. "And it is best that I should come to it; for I have no children to endanger, and my dear wife being taken from me, there is only myself, and I prefer the harder places. I came specially to-night," he went on, as if to throw off the subject, "to know where Mr. Hawksworth will sleep after the meeting. I shall be glad to offer him a bed, unless someone else wishes to have him. I thought perhaps you would know."

"If you can take him," replied Mr. Rimmon, "I think it would be a convenience, as I know several of the people who usually entertain, have got sickness in the house just now."

Mr. Rimmon was so utterly unaccustomed to exercise hospitality himself, that it did not enter his head that he and not the minister should have received the stranger.

"That is all I wanted to know," said Mr. Gray, "and I see you are busy. I must not interrupt you."

"Oh," said Mr. Rimmon, waving his hand towards the table, "I was merely writing the names in the prize-books. I have plenty of time to finish them; Mrs Rimmon will be here in a moment, and she will like to see you."

As he spoke, Mrs. Rimmon entered. She glanced nervously at her husband and then at his visitor, who shook her heartily by the hand, and asked her how she was.

It was always a treat to Mrs. Rimmon when Mr. Gray dropped in; he was so cheery and kindly, and did not seem to look down upon her. He had been but a year in Jumley, and would in all probability remain two more, according to the three years' system prevailing among the Wesleyans.

Mrs. Rimmon's name was upon Mr. Gray's society class-book, but since his advent he had not seen her once at the class. He never severely

pressed her to attend, but sometimes told her how glad he should be to see her if she came. He was really anxious about it at heart, because to his mind she did not look happy ; and he honestly believed that the class-meeting was a great means of increasing happiness. He had found it so himself, he told Mrs. Rimmon ; and their great founder Wesley had strongly believed in it.

Poor Mrs. Rimmon felt her life to be false, and herself under a ban ; but she was convinced that she could not go and listen to the confessions of honest strivers after a higher life without in the end unburdening her soul of its load ; so she kept away, though her name had always been on the book as a member of the minister's class, whatever minister might be in residence.

To-night Mr. Gray said, "We are still hoping to see you some Wednesday evening, Mrs. Rimmon."

"I haven't much time to spare," Mrs. Rimmon replied, faintly, without daring to look up.

"Won't you try and make time?" said Mr. Gray earnestly. "I wouldn't ask you if I didn't believe it would make you happier. You see the world is so far from God, it cannot understand God's people ; and they are happier for meeting together to talk over the life they are trying to lead, and the happy future before them."

"I'm not good enough to come," replied Mrs. Rimmon, still ever so faintly.

"We are none of us good when compared with Christ," said the minister ; "but do not let anything deter you."

"I think I will come," said Mrs. Rimmon, glancing at her husband with a hunted look. He was not looking up at all.

Mr. Gray rose, and tied a white muffler round his throat, put on a respirator, and took his leave.

As soon as he had left the house, Mr. Rimmon turned upon his wife, and asked her in a towering passion what she meant by playing the fool.

She trembled violently, but made no answer.

"Don't you know you madden me?" said Joshua, glancing at her, "when you look at me, as you do, when people are here, as if you were afraid of me ; as if I were some ogre."

"You have made me afraid of you, Joshua," said Mrs. Rimmon in a gasping way ; "and I'm always afraid to speak when you are here."

"Why don't you go to the class like other people do?"

"What can I say if I go there? If I told the truth, Joshua, I should have to say——"

"Stuff and nonsense!" broke in Mr. Rimmon. "Do you think any of the people at the classes tell their real feelings?"

"I am sure they do, Joshua."

"Well they're not obliged to," replied Joshua wrathfully.

"And I don't think I can go. There would be two——"

"Two what?" broke in her husband, determined to make her finish her sentence.

"Oh, please, don't make me say," pleaded Mrs. Rimmon, "I beg of you."

"You shall say," said Mr. Rimmon; and he took hold of his wife's wrist, and stared into her face till she felt as if she shrank up. "Two what?" he said right in her ear.

"Oh, don't be so angry, Joshua."

"I will tell you what you meant," he replied; "two impostors instead of one, you were going to say. Now, once for all, if you do make any confessions on your own account, keep my name out of it, or it will be the worse for you. If you have thoughts, keep them to yourself." And, having said his say, he turned to his books, and went on writing the names as if nothing had occurred, while his wife sat as if frozen up, looking into the fire. It was the first time her husband had owned himself an impostor to her; and now that he had owned it, it looked like the beginning of the end. He had surprised her secret mistrust of him, and had in no way defended himself. He had torn down part of the veil. When would he tear down the rest, and show himself to the world?

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SERPENT'S TONGUE.

THINGS did not improve at The Hollies after Keziah's visit. Maud and her husband were on worse terms every day; and as it was not in Maud's nature to hide the true state of affairs, the fact was patent to the whole household, and, indeed, to more of the neighbourhood than might be imagined, considering how few acquaintances the family had.

Maud made some effort to get rid of Laura after Keziah's advice, but Laura opened her big, innocent eyes, and begged Maud not to send her

away yet, for it was so dreadfully dull at home: Maud told her that it could not be duller anywhere for her than at The Hollies ; but Laura protested that she enjoyed being there, and hoped they would let her stay a little longer. Of course, after this, she had *carte blanche* to stay as long as she liked.

Maud had contracted a habit of taking long walks between lunch and dinner; and in these walks Laura never accompanied her, though Maud always gave her the opportunity of doing so. Laura did not like long walks ; she would rather read, if Mrs. Towers did not object.

On one dreary afternoon, during a dense fog, Maud was out, and Laura was wandering in the garden, which was now dank with decaying leaves. She paced backwards and forwards impatiently by the hedge that divided this garden from David Rimmon's. It was a Saturday, and Jubal would be at home early, and had promised to come and speak with her as soon as he returned.

Jubal was later than usual, and Laura feared Maud would be back before she should have had time to speak to Jubal. But no ; at last she heard his footstep on the fallen and wet leaves. She moved to a part of the hedge which was low enough for her to see over.

"Why didn't you come before, Jack?" she asked.

"I couldn't."

"Another time I shan't wait," was the young lady's response. "I've a very good mind to go home on Monday, because you've kept me waiting so."

"I tell you I couldn't help it," repeated Jubal sharply ; "it's not my fault if people come to look over the mills, and I have to go over with them and uncle."

"Oh, that alters the case," said Laura, "so I'll forgive you. How much property did you tell me your uncle had?" she added, in the same breath.

"Don't let's talk about that," said Jubal ; "it's not interesting."

"Oh, yes, it is," Laura insisted ; "I love to talk about property, especially when you are to have it all."

"It will be yours too, if you marry me," said Jubal.

"If," rejoined Laura.

"But you will, you know you will ; you promised me."

"I shan't marry anybody who can't let me have a carriage to ride in."

"You shall have a carriage, and you shall have everything, Laura, if you marry me."

"But perhaps somebody else will give a carriage and marry me before you are out of your time and are old enough to marry me," said Laura spitefully.

"If you do have anyone else than me, Laura, he shan't have you long, for I'd make an end of him."

"You daren't," said Laura; "you haven't pluck enough."

"That you don't know," retorted Jubal, between his teeth. "I'm not the kid you used to know, and so he'd find out——But there's somebody coming in the garden," he added, and went away immediately.

The somebody was on Laura's side of the hedge. It was the master of the house. He had evidently not seen Laura. He seemed quite absorbed, and walked with a slow, unheeding step up and down a path. Laura had a curiosity that was perfectly daring in its character, and she really enjoyed seeing people suffer. The same instinct that makes some boys stone cats and dogs, made Laura touch with terrible precision the wounded spots in human hearts, just for the pleasure of seeing them writhe. And noting an opportunity for her favourite sport, she overtook Towers, and in her candid way said—

"I don't think Maud means to be unkind to you. Don't be unhappy."

The speech sounded innocent enough; and Towers looked gratefully at her, for he thought, "Here is a child that cannot understand, but nevertheless sympathises," so he took her hand and placed it on his arm, glad of her company, glad to get away from himself.

"No," he said, echoing her words. "Maud doesn't mean to be unkind."

"Still," continued Laura, as if with a little hesitation, and in a very innocent tone indeed, "if she really loved you like some wives love their husbands, in books, she would not make you miserable as she does."

The girl's words awoke a dormant thought within Towers—a thought he had drugged to sleep. Maud must have lost her love for him. If that were true——

Yet he went on, with a ghastly attempt to appear to be chatting without an object. "Still, different people have different ways of showing their love."

"I don't think they talk against people they love, to other people," remarked Laura, still very innocently; "in books, I mean."

"But Maud doesn't talk to anybody against me," replied Towers, thinking within himself. "This child little knows what hangs on her answer."

The "child" knew very well what she was doing, however, and continued to probe the wound ; so she said, raising her childish eyes wide-open and direct, "Maud does."

"To whom?" asked Towers, feeling himself to vibrate.

"She talked against you to Keziah, when she was here. And she watches you, too; and she saw you meet that man; so did Mrs. Hackbit."

Towers stood still in the path, and said nothing. He felt like some have felt when they have wandered too far and the rising tide has cut off their retreat homewards. There is nothing for them but the dreadful waiting for the cruel waves that draw nearer every minute.

Laura prattled on. "I don't know what Maud thinks you do, but I believe she sets people to watch you, and she looks in your pockets when you are out. She opened your desk and looked over that. She says she can't think what you do with all your money. And women can't know what men want money for, can they, Mr. Towers? Mamma always says that men know their own business best, and that women had much better not interfere; and it is silly of Maud. If she didn't torment you, you'd tell her all about it, shouldn't you, Mr. Towers? But of course you won't, when she's always vexing you. If I were your wife," went on Laura, more innocently than ever, "I shouldn't want you to tell me what you didn't want to."

Her words thrilled through Towers, who was like a drowning man catching at a straw. This child, then, believed in him. How sweet it was to be believed in, when everything was lost, even the love of the woman bound to him for life. With a deep and bitter resolution in his heart, urged on by a yet deeper despair he kissed Laura's forehead, and called her a good little girl, and told her that when she should grow up she might have a husband who would love her. And the vain creature thought within herself, "He would much rather have had me than Maud;" and found the thought highly gratifying.

At this point in the conversation, Maud was seen entering the gate. Laura went to her, but Tom stayed where he was, moody and morose "If she doesn't spare my reputation, why should I spare hers? It must be quite true; she can't love me." And a bitter smile came on his face as he thought: "I will give myself up, and brand her." Then he thought, "I will die qualified. A few more weeks, and I shall have my qualification, unless the fates thwart me in that as in so much else. And as she is so curious, she shall know—yes, she shall know what

luxuries I have spent her money in. She shall look into Bluebeard's chamber, and pay the cost." He felt nothing but bitterness against Maud, and not a fragment of the old affection that had so stirred him before he won her. His whole mind was conscious now of only one feeling ; it was hatred. He hated Maud. He hated his uncle, for being better than he was. He hated his aunts, for their meek faces, and their shabby gowns, worn for his sake. He hated all qualified medical men. He hated David Rimmon for looking so complacent as he passed home to his wifeless house. He hated the servants, because they could sleep at night and carry light hearts in the day. He hated Keziah, for being the confidante of his wife. He hated those who made money demands upon him. He hated one dead man, the cause of this. He hated himself, God-forsaken as he was. Yes, he hated all the world, unless, perhaps, it might be Laura, who was not old enough, nor quick-witted enough to be spoilt by the world yet.

In the meantime, this one little exception to his universal hatred was talking to his wife, who was removing her walking-dress, and preparing for dinner.

"Mr. Towers looks very unhappy," Laura began. "He says he knows you don't love him a bit."

She could proceed no further with Maud, who refused to listen. But the work was done.

"So," she thought, "he has been talking to this child, has he, about me?" And she froze against the man she had promised to love.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WHICH WILL BE STRONGER ?

MR. HACKBIT stuck to Mr. Rimmon's business affairs with the utmost devotion. He resigned himself to doing without holidays, but certainly not out of consideration for Mr. Rimmon ; which fact no doubt he communicated to his uncle, as it was his habit to do, if a fact were disagreeable. Jubal being disinherited, Hackbit was quite sure of the property falling into his hands ; and Mr. Rimmon was rapidly growing very rich. No false move on Hackbit's part should mar his future ; and for this reason he upheld his uncle's virtuous character on all occasions.

But while he did this, he felt under no obligation to reflect additional

lustre upon the family by being virtuous himself, or appearing to be so. He never entered a place of worship under any circumstances; and he and Mr. Rimpler passed the hours of Sunday in ways best known to themselves, for it was usually in company. Keziah always went to chapel at least once on a Sunday; and the rest of the day she spent with her children, or visiting the sick.

She drooped more and more under the suppression and anxiety of her life. She endured the future in addition to the present, being filled with dread both for herself and her children, more especially for poor Bertram. She almost wished now that she had let Maud have him at first; but having grown continually fonder of him since her marriage, she felt she could not now bear to part with him. She never left the house without taking the children, or at any rate Bertram, with her; and one Saturday afternoon, in fact, the same Saturday on which Laura made so much mischief between Maud and her husband, Keziah, having occasion to go to Birmingham, had ordered Bertram to be dressed to go too. The child was in a state of high glee; to go out with his mother was the greatest joy he had. But while Wilson was putting on his gaiters, his foster-father came in.

He simply glanced at what was going on, then went to where Keziah was dressing. "Why do you always drag that boy about with you?" he said insolently, to his wife, who was tying her bonnet on.

Keziah saw herself flush in the glass. She did not offer any reply.

"I'd be ashamed to be always seen about with the child, while your own is left at home."

"It is safe to leave the other one at home," retorted Keziah, scornfully, "for he is yours."

"Well, I'm master here," Hackbit asserted, still more insolently, "and Bertram shall not go, unless Leonard goes."

"You may be master here," replied Keziah, turning defiantly to him, with hot cheeks, "but I shall disobey you in this case. It's no weather to take Leonard. But I understand your motive quite well. You only want to annoy me." Then with a mighty effort suppressing her anger, she looked pleadingly at her husband with those beautiful, touching eyes, and said in a voice which was always like music when she was not angry, "Do let us try to get on well together, Thomas. I never willingly vex you. You know I am passionate. In pity try not to rouse my passion."

"What a fool you are!" exclaimed Hackbit.

"I may appear so to eyes blinded by drink," replied Keziah, flashing

out again, her gentler mood forsaking her in a moment, at his hard words. "You shall find me no fool, I promise you. I was a fool to marry you," she added. "Reformed rakes make the best husbands, they say; and that may be quite true; but when do rakes ever reform? I tell you, Thomas Hackbit," she said, stamping her little foot, "don't goad me on. I don't mind appearances, and the world may say just what it chooses. I am not going to stay under your roof, and smile, and pretend to be happy, like some women would. Go a little further, and I shall leave the place. I've earned my living once, and I can do it again."

"Ha, ha," laughed Mr. Hackbit. "The law would have something to say about that."

"I know the laws are made by men," said Keziah, "and are all against women. But no law should bring me back to you, if once I left you. So you shall make me comfortable, or I shall go."

Nothing could have surprised Hackbit more than this. It was the last thing he would have thought of Keziah's doing, for she had borne so much from him since their marriage; and he knew she meant what she said. He went away, grinding his teeth, and thinking within himself, "The old devil her father was right, then; I have caught a Tartar."

When Keziah had gone, Mr. Hackbit adjourned to the dining-room, and calling in Mr. Rimpler, uncorked some brandy. And after he had taken a couple of glasses he said to him—

"You were never married, were you, Rimpler?"

"Well, not precisely," replied that gentleman, looking inquiringly into Mr. Hackbit's face.

"I'll answer for it, you were never in love," said Hackbit.

"Ha, ha," laughed the non-committive Rimpler.

"Shows your sense," went on Hackbit, taking this for assent. "Women are all right when you are on the right side of them; but rub 'em up the wrong way, and they turn into fiends. Makes me sick to hear men talk about women," continued Mr. Hackbit, drinking more brandy: "the gentle wives and tender mothers of romances. It's all a pack of stuff and nonsense. They're not gentle wives nor tender mothers. They're selfishness personified. That's my opinion of women."

"It sounds strange to hear a married man talk so," insinuated Mr. Rimpler, "with such a bright example by his side of the opposite to his theories."

"Bright example be —," burst out Hackbit, drinking more; "she's

no bright 'example. She's infernally like the others, only sharper. I wish my wife was at the bottom of the sea ; and the confounded brat with her."

"The brat's all right," remarked Rimpler. "To tell you the truth, I like the child, and it isn't often I like anything. But there's the office-bell ;" and Mr. Rimpler got up and left Hackbit to finish his bottle of brandy ; and thought within himself, "He'll be ripe to hear something by to-night, I should say."

When night came, Keziah had not returned ; she had gone into her father's, Hackbit supposed. But as a matter of fact, she had not reached Jumley. After having made her purchases in Birmingham, she walked down Union Passage, to see the shops. This passage is always rather dark, as those who know it will remember ; so much so, that Keziah could see her own reflection in the shop windows, when she was not directly looking at the objects.

She stood for some time before a shop where ivory goods of every discription were displayed ; and as she looked she suddenly observed the reflection of her old lover beside her own on the window-glass. A glad smile broke on her face, which was also reflected in the same mirror. She turned round and faced the original.

He did not look so angry as on the only other occasion on which they had met, and she hoped he would not pass without saying something kind. She was very white, but she held out her hand to him, and said very touchingly—

"Don't go away, Rupert, without saying a little kind word."

"Why, Kizzy," he said, so much in his old tone that for a moment it almost transferred her into the past, when they had been all to each other, "you are looking very white and very thin. Come with me and have some wine."

She hesitated, and he said with a faint smile, "You needn't object, Keziah. I would do as much for anyone I saw looking so weary as you look, for I'm a doctor."

And then for the first time noticing the child by her side, he said, "Is this the little child you adopted ?"

She assented, gazing into his face as if to drink in the look of him, the dear aspect for ever in her mind. "Oh," she thought, "if he were nearer, and I could only see him pass once every day, I should never be so miserable !" and without thinking what she did,

she said, plaintively, "It does me good to see you, so much good ; I don't think I should be so miserable if I could see you sometimes."

Miserable ! The girl he would have died to make happy ! Then she *was* miserable. The thought fired his soul.

"And would it do you good to see me, Kizzy?" he said, very gently and pityingly. "Then why shouldn't you see me sometimes? There would be no wrong in that."

"Oh, Rupert," said Keziah, with the old light in her eyes, "now that we have met, and quite by accident, we can explain, can't we? We shall never meet again. It cannot be wrong, just to explain."

Elworthy felt that explanations should be out of the question, and would be dangerous ; but could he tell her so now, with her lovely eyes looking at him, and her innocent tones appealing to him? He would be a cur to do it, he thought. No, he would make her happy for the few minutes they would be together.

"Dear Kizzy," he said, even more tenderly than in the old days, "you spoke of some letter in which I confessed everything. I never wrote it. Oh, dearest love," he said, his feelings becoming uncontrollable, "why did you believe it without seeing me?"

"Don't reproach me, Rupert," she said, with tears in her eyes ; "I suffer for it, every day, every hour."

"You were stolen from me, Keziah—you were not won ;" and the thought that arose instantaneously, as if suggested by an evil spirit, was, "And why not take back my own?"

He did not refer to this thought, however, but asked her, "Is your husband kind to you, Kizzy?" And the words almost choked him.

"Oh, Rupert, he drinks, and he has a dreadful clerk, who leads him into wickedness."

"Ah !" thought Elworthy, "what is so maddening an intoxicant as the sight of the beloved object within reach, and yet forbidden?" And he, who in his meditations, far away from Keziah, had felt himself so strong, found temptation upon him as powerfully as if he had never had scruples, never made resolves. Love, almighty love, was paramount. After all, in the eyes of God, was not Keziah his? His brain seemed to whirl, and in the whirl there existed for him only himself and Keziah ; and he poured out his love for her afresh, telling her she was never out of his thoughts night or day ; telling her, too, how he had ridden in the night-time to have one look at her window, and thought never to speak of

it ; but perhaps it would comfort her to know. And no one saw him ; so it could not harm his darling.

Every word he spoke was balm to Keziah's spirit. It had come to her again, the tender voice, and the kind look ; the irretrievably lost had come back to her. The floodgates were opened. "Oh, Rupert," she said, "now that I know that you love me always the same, and that you are innocent of that charge, I shall bear my lot better. And, Rupert, promise me you won't marry."

"My own love, no," said Elworthy, stopping after each word impressively, and holding her little hand tightly between his own. "Oh, my Kizzy, perhaps we are not eternally separated, even now. Who knows what Providence may even yet send us? Live in hope, my Kizzy. Happen what may, I am always yours ; yours far from you, or by your side, as you command."

"Oh !" suddenly said Keziah, "I've done very wrong to talk with you so. We must never meet again, never."

"What harm have we done?" said Elworthy, reproachfully.

"But it is wrong," said Keziah ; "and if *he* were to know——"

She stood irresolute. But the look of her old lover caused her to almost wail out, "Why should it be wrong for me to see you? It does seem cruel."

"You are mine by God's law, but another's by man's law," he returned.

"But you must never meet me any more," said Keziah.

"Not unless you need me. But if you need me, really ; if you are in trouble, Kizzy ; I will tell you where to find me. From this time, I come every Wednesday evening to your garden gate, I will never speak to you again unless you ask it. However, I will walk to the station with you now, at any rate."

The lamps were by this time lit. Keziah had not the courage to refuse his company ; and Elworthy, walking by her side, tried to imagine, for one moment's bliss, that she belonged to him. He found it happiness indeed to have her walking by his side, and no one near but strangers, quite as if she were his. He could not help asking the question, "What days do you come to Birmingham, Kizzy?"

"I don't know when I shall come here again," said Keziah plaintively.

"I will tell you what to do," Elworthy went on, refusing to notice his conscience, that was upbraiding him. "If you are going to Birmingham

the next day, put a piece of paper under a stone outside your garden gate ; if the next day but one, put two pieces of paper ; if in three days, put three pieces of paper, and so on. Don't write a word upon the paper, of any kind. If ever you want me, you will know that on Wednesday evenings I am near, and I shall look for the sign."

"I wish I felt it was quite right," said Keziah.

"Can there be a wrong or a right," burst forth Elworthy, "in dealing with a man who has stolen the only thing I cared for in the world and who is not kind to her? Besides, Kizzy, are you not sacred to me? Do you think I would harm you?"

The road leading directly into the station was but ill lit. Elworthy could not resist the temptation; he took his darling into his arms and kissed her. In another moment they were parted, and soon afterwards the train was bearing Keziah and the sleeping Bertram to Jumley.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SUBTLETY'S SUCCESS.

AS Mr. Rimpler had predicted to himself, Mr. Hackbit was in condition that evening to hear something. The office closed at four, that is to clients. The lawyer and his clerk most commonly spent their evenings there when neither of them had business elsewhere ; and thither Mr. Hackbit had adjourned, when the maid came into the dining-room to lay the tea, and interrupted him at his brandy bottle.

He looked very quarrelsome, Rimpler thought ; and decided to give him an object for his wrath. So he said—

"Are you going to the station to meet Mrs. Hackbit? She is later than usual."

"No, I am not," replied the lawyer. "She shaid," continued Mr. Hackbit, whose articulation invariably suffered when he reached a certain state of drunkenness, "she shaid she'd leave me. P'raps she'sh done it, be d——d to her."

"Not likely. Where could she go?" said Mr. Rimpler.

"To the convict," said Hackbit, who alluded to Elworthy under this erroneous title.

"What convict?" inquired Rimpler.

"The infernal doctor convict. He wash going to marry her, but I

wash one too many for him ;” and Hackbit eyed his companion with a cunning leer.

“ Perhaps he’ll be too sharp for you one of these days. What’s he like to look at ? ”

Mr. Hackbit began a description of Elworthy, more or less lucid ; whereupon his clerk said—

“ Well, now, that is strange. I’ve seen a fellow like that hanging about ; and I saw Mrs. Hackbit with him the first day I came here.”

The words penetrated Hackbit’s fuddled brain, and almost sobered him.

“ You’ve—seen—him—hanging about—here ; and seen Keziah—with—him ! ” he repeated. “ You’re telling me a d—d lie.”

“ Perhaps I’m mistaken,” said Mr. Rimpler, in a tone of indifference, having shot his dart home, and knowing that he had aroused a suspicion that nothing he might say afterwards could lay to sleep. He had no wish to be thought to have any interest in the case himself ; so he immediately set to work to copy something, with an energy and precision which did him much credit.

“ Rimpler,” said Hackbit, interrupting him, “ that was a lie you told now ? ”

“ Perhaps it was.”

“ Confound you, Rimpler, was it a lie you told just now ? ” persisted Hackbit.

“ Why, really,” said Rimpler, “ you nearly made me make a mistake, you shouted so.”

“ You’ll make a bigger mistake if you keep anything from me. You said you saw them together. What were they doing ? ”

“ Well, really now, I can’t say.”

“ That’s a lie, at any rate. If you saw them together at all, you can tell something about it. Come, now, what sort of terms were they on ? ”

“ Well, now you press me, I will tell you, though I’ve no wish to make mischief. They seemed on very good terms, and sorry to have to part. I observed that Mrs. Hackbit was crying, or very near it.”

“ Well ? ” said Hackbit interrogatively. “ And you say he has been hanging about here since then ? ”

“ Well, yes,” replied Rimpler, as if he didn’t take the least interest in the thing. “ But I’ve not seen him with her.”

“ Well, what *did* you see him doing ? ”

“ He did no more and no less than throw a kiss to his mistress’s candle,” returned Rimpler, with an aggravating jocoseness of manner.

"Look here, Rimpler," said Hackbit, "this is nothing to laugh at."

"There's nothing in the world fit to laugh at," replied Rimpler, "it's all so confoundedly stale. Bah!" he said contemptuously, "everybody's grinding on the same old game."

"Well," said Hackbit, ignoring this comment, "if he's been here in the night, Keziah's never known it; I'm sure of that."

"Oh, no," asserted Rimpler, indifferently. "You are such a pattern husband, and make her so happy, I shouldn't think she'd wish to know it."

"Rimpler," said Hackbit, not noticing the sneer, "tell me the downright truth if you can; do you think there's anything in this you've been telling me?"

"It's impossible for me to know," replied Rimpler, innocently. "How can I, now? It's a matter for you to judge in."

"Oh," groaned Hackbit, "if this is true, I shall die on the gallows."

Hackbit was staring at a round bright spot on the ceiling, made by the lamp. "If it is true," he went on, "and she plays me false, I'll be the death of her, if I hang for it."

Rimpler looked at him to see if he were in earnest. He decided that he was. Hackbit's nature was one that prized beyond everything what it possessed not, or what it feared to lose. When Keziah was his, safe, and he had no doubt, he ignored her for the most part. Now that he feared her old lover might still have some influence over her, he felt boiling over with a frantic animal love for her, which was very like hatred in its effects. He was pretty sober now, and a splitting headache was upon him. He sat still a long time, steadily thinking out the case; and then he decided to go up to Mr. Rimmon's, to see if his wife was there.

He found Keziah had not arrived; but his uncle was at home; and the first words his uncle addressed to him, on seeing him enter the room, added fuel to the fire.

"You look as if you had been drinking again, Thomas."

"D—— you," replied his nephew, seating himself in the easy-chair by the fire, and kicking a cat, that happened to be lying there, half across the room.

Mr. Rimmon looked a little alarmed, but said nothing. Mr. Hackbit did not say anything, either; but glared in the direction of the sofa, under which puss had hidden herself. Mr. Hackbit picked up one of Mr. Rimmon's slippers, and flung it at her; and then asked in a very peremptory manner, "How much longer is Keziah going to be?"

"Well, really," said his uncle, "how am I to know? She's under your care now, you know. She's gone to Birmingham, isn't she?"

"Yes," said Hackbit; "or hell, I don't know which."

"You are disgustingly profane, Thomas," said his uncle. "Keziah is likelier to go to heaven than either you or me."

"Ah," said Hackbit, "when you go to heaven the fallen angels will be restored, and you'll all go together. A fine meeting that will be; and may I be there to see. How handsome you'll look, with a crown on your head, and playing on the harp that you talk about. Oh, goodness!" and Hackbit roared with laughter.

As they spoke, Keziah, with Bertram in her arms, entered the house.

Keziah, though she almost feared to let herself be happy, was so much happier for having seen Rupert, that she resolved to try once more to conciliate her lawful lord; and by this means she thought to balance the account in her conscience for the happiness she had stolen that day. Despite her load, she marched in with a gay and youthful step; and finding her mother busy in the kitchen, sat down there a moment.

"I've brought you the new window-blinds you asked for, mother," said Keziah, watching her rolling out the paste. "How late you are with cooking!" she went on.

"Well, my dear, your father never told me till half-an-hour ago that Mr. Gray was coming to-morrow, so I had to begin now. I wish you and Thomas could come in," she went on.

"I'll ask him," said Keziah.

"He's in the dining-room with your father. So you'll be able to tell us before you go."

All at once they heard a noise that made them both start. It was the poor cat, which had been liberated from the dining-room, and had rushed frantically into the kitchen.

"I think I'll go in and speak to Thomas," said Keziah.

So she rose, with the sleeping Bertram in her arms, and went into the dining-room.

Only her husband was there, Mr. Rimmon having gone upstairs to fetch something, which had been the occasion of the cat's getting out.

"Thomas," said Keziah, in a friendly and conciliatory tone, "mother wants us to come in here to-morrow, to have dinner with the minister."

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Hackbit, smiling scornfully, "and I'm so very obliging, so very good-natured, and so very fond of your papa and mamma,

that of course I shall accept with pleasure." And to this satire he added another. "Being on bad terms with me seems to suit you, Keziah : I haven't seen you looking so well for a long time, which is just a trifle remarkable, considering the tiring day you've had in Birmingham."

The tears welled up into Keziah's eyes. She could not help contrasting his tone to her with Rupert's. But with a mighty effort towards rectitude, she said, without any show of temper, "I am sorry I vexed you this morning, Thomas. Forgive me. I shall try to do better."

"Really, now," said Thomas, "as I am of such a forgiving nature, and I'm so blind, and so deaf and so easily hoodwinked, and am so sure you're so fond of me, I think I'll forgive you. Really now, it's quite pathetic to think of. This is the very spot on which I asked you to be mine. I obtained my prize : the purest, the best tempered, and wisest and most reliable of women ; I congratulate myself. Yes," he went on, "go and tell your mother we'll be most happy to come in to-morrow, two turtle-doves, to coo at her table."

Keziah knew he must be desperately angry, but had no idea of the cause ; so she went and told her mother, that as far as she could make out, Thomas said he would come. She then said, "Good-night," and went out with her husband.

He took hold of her arm as they walked the few steps that led to their house, and held it with so tight a grip that she could scarcely help crying out.

"You are hurting me," she said at last, unable to bear it any longer.

"It's only my great affection," returned Mr. Hackbit grimly.

Somehow, Keziah never felt so much afraid of him in her life. Her heart failed her as they entered the house together.

On the following morning the sun shone out, and Bertram and Leonard, in company with Wilson, went into the garden for fresh air and exercise. There they were joined by Mr. Rimpler, who, much to Wilson's disgust, began to laugh and play with Bertram, and at last ran with him to some distance.

"Who was the gentleman your mamma talked to in Birmingham yesterday?" asked Mr. Rimpler of Bertram, when at a safe distance from Wilson.

"I don't know," said Bertram, "but he was a beautiful gentleman, and gave me lots of nice things."

"And didn't he give dear mamma anything?" inquired Mr. Rimpler seductively.

"Yes," said Bertram, "he gave her some wine."

"He was very fond of mamma, wasn't he?" went on Rimpler.

"Oh, yes," said Bertram, "very fond of her."

"Can you remember what he said to mamma?"

"No," said the little fellow stoutly, "I don't know."

Mr. Rimpler had got all he wanted; so he rode the boy round the garden on his shoulder, and then went into the office.

When he had gone, Wilson said to Bertram—

"Bertram mustn't love that naughty man, and mustn't play with him."

"But he isn't naughty," maintained Bertram, "and I like him—— I didn't know he went to Birmingham yesterday, but he did; and he saw me and mamma and the gentleman."

"He's been teasing you," said Wilson; "he never stirred out all day."

"But he did go, nurse," persisted the little fellow, "or else how did he see me and mamma and the gentleman?"

Though Wilson had discouraged Bertram, his words sank into her heart, and gave her what she would have termed "a turn." She had heard Keziah's story from Sarah. She knew, she could hardly have said from what quarter, that Dr. Elworthy was still unmarried, and in the neighbourhood, that is, within easy distance; and what Bertram had said made her think of Elworthy immediately, she could not have told why. It was not mistrust of Keziah. The one absorbing thought of her life was Keziah and Keziah's happiness. Everyone else that she cared about had been taken from her years before; and since she had nursed them all in illness, and seen them die one after another, in spite of all her care, and leave the familiar hearth desolate—father, mother, grandmother, two sisters, and a baby brother—she had gone out into the world to earn her living, at war with the God who had deprived her of everything, angry with people who had what she had not. She liked nobody, and nobody liked her, with the single exception of Keziah, and perhaps Mrs. Rimmon. She thought bitterly now, as she dwelt upon the circumstances, that her innocent darling might have seen her old lover—without intending it, of course, she thought, jerkily. But if that fiend in human form, Rimpler, was sneaking after Keziah, and prying, somebody else should sneak and pry too; and she fully made up her mind that nothing Mr. Rimpler did should pass unnoticed, and she meditated upon the matter till close on dinner-time.

At this hour, Mr. Hackbit was filling the drawing-room with tobacco-smoke, while he lay upon the fashionable sofa. This had two ends, on one of which he placed his feet, while his head rested on the sofa pillow at the other end, at a considerably lower level. He feigned not to notice Keziah's entrance, dressed to go out ; he rather enjoyed ignoring her.

"Tom," said Keziah in as friendly a tone as she could adopt, considering his attitude, mental rather than physical, "isn't it time for us to go to mother's ? You promised to go, you know."

"I promised, did I ?" said Hackbit, sententiously. "Then all I can say is, I shall not fulfil. You must have been a fool to think I should go. You go, if you want to. I don't want your company, and shall not cry while you're away."

"Oh, Thomas," said Keziah, who felt her patience much tried. "What's the use of sneering at everything ? Why can't we try and be agreeable ?"

"Come let us dissemble," replied her lord.

"I don't understand what you mean," said Keziah.

"I rather think you do understand, both what I say and how to do it ; but go on to your mother's and your respectable father's, and digest what I said with your dinner."

Keziah went away, feeling very desperate. It was of no use for her to try ; her husband was resolved not to get on with her. Whatever good resolves she had made, her husband's unkind conduct had made them take flight. He did not deserve to be considered so much. If he ill-used her she would stop trying to please him. When she arrived at her father's, Mr. Rimmon and Mr. Gray had already returned from chapel. Dinner was always early on the Sunday, because there was Sunday School afterwards. Mr. Gray looked very weary, and sank almost exhausted into a chair. Keziah's kind heart was moved by the sight, and she sympathetically asked him if she could do anything for him.

"No, thank you," he replied, with a smile, "I shall be better directly. The morning service always tries me. The chapel is warmer in the evening. I don't complain," he went on ; "none of these things happen by chance. If my heart is weak, and causes me to suffer, I am sure it is for the ripening of my soul, and for the perfecting of me for the life that is to come."

"Oh," said Keziah, "do you believe there is a life to come ?"

"What a question, my child, to ask of a minister of the Gospel !" he said, in some amazement.

She had not thought of the inappropriateness of her question, but had asked it out of the desolation of her soul, perhaps out of some latent hope that this man, who suffered and was brave, might give her some convincing proof that there was indeed a future worth striving after, and a God that cared. She had never had very strong religious convictions, which was probably her father's fault. Yet she had a nature that could have been profoundly religious under some circumstances. Keziah's religion, if one may be allowed to term it so, was the desire to do right at any cost according to the light that she had ; and so exemplary had been her life, that her question surprised Mr. Gray not a little. He almost feared she was jesting at first, until he looked into her face ; and a jest about religion he could scarcely forgive.

"You believe there is a God, Mrs. Hackbit ?" he said nervously.

"Yes," replied Keziah ; "but I don't think He cares for people."

The minister echoed her words, "Cares for people," in a shocked tone.

"If He does," went on Keziah, "He lets dreadful things happen."

"Do you mean my heart disease ?" asked the minister, greatly troubled. "If I see His love through it, surely no one else need doubt."

"Oh, I don't mean that," said Keziah. "Heart disease is nothing."

The minister was startled by her words, and hurt, too. "Heart disease nothing !" he thought. "Could she pass my wakeful nights, and suffer the torture I often suffer, and the terrible exhaustion that follows, she would not call heart disease nothing." He looked at Keziah thinking she knew very little, when she called heart disease nothing, Keziah was thinking, "If he could change his heart disease for my pain of mind, day and night alike, with no rest, no respite, he would think any bodily illness light compared with it." In this manner do we look on the sufferings of others and compare them with our own.

Both remained silent, and the dinner went off quietly enough. No one asked where Mr. Hackbit was, though he had been expected. Eccentric and rude actions on his part counted as nothing ; they were so ordinary.

While Mr. Rimmon was on his way to the Sunday School that afternoon, he happened by mere chance to see Mr. Rimpler shaking hands with his sister Dorcas. This brought to a head thoughts that had already been fermenting in his mind, and he resolved that he would call and consult Hackbit after school as to the advisability of taking Rimpler into their confidence.

This idea he carried out. He found his nephew in almost the same

place where Keziah had left him in the morning, and in a stage near upon recovery from a drunken fit. When Hackbit saw his uncle entering the room, he call out rudely, "Rub your shoes, will you."

"I invariably rub my shoes, Thomas," Mr. Rimmon replied, colouring a little; "and I have not departed from my rule on this occasion."

"What overpowering language!" said Hackbit derisively. "Are you practising for the pulpit? I declare I'd come and hear you preach, to see how neatly the skin fitted."

"What skin?" inquired Mr. Rimmon, very much annoyed.

"A sheep's skin: I should notice particularly if there were any rents through which the wolf might be seen."

"Perhaps you are not aware, Thomas, that you are talking in a tone that may be heard all over the house," said Mr. Rimmon, shutting the door firmly. "I must tell you, Thomas, you annoy me very much; you promised you'd reform when you had got Keziah and a home of your own; and you've done nothing of the sort. You've got worse than ever, I think."

"Yes," returned Mr. Hackbit, "I think you're correct. And it is strange, considering I have everything to induce me to be sober, including the most faithful and tender wife."

The tone in which this was spoken was not lost upon Mr. Rimmon, who said, more warmly than was his habit in addressing Hackbit—

"I don't know why you use that tone when speaking of Keziah. You know you can say nothing against her."

"Is that your belief?" asked his son-in-law. "Well, I was fool enough to believe in her once, so I can't wonder that such a pighead as you should."

"What have you against her?" demanded her father, with much asperity.

"I shan't tell you. It's none of your business. What was it you came here for?"

"I came to talk with you about the advisability of letting Rimpler into our secret. You see you're so often now unable to go to the office, and I lose business."

"Don't you fret your addled pate about that," said Hackbit; "he knows all about it now."

"Thomas!" said Mr. Rimmon, in a tone of the utmost reproach. "How could you tell him without asking me!"

"I tell him! I didn't tell him. Don't alarm yourself."

"Then how does he know?" inquired the father-in-law incredulously.

"How does he know all my business, and everything, curse him? I don't know. But he just knows as much as you or I know; and I can't part with him now."

"I saw him speaking to your aunt just now," said Mr. Rimmon. "I didn't know he knew her."

"He knows everybody and everything," was Hackbit's conclusive rejoinder. "And now if you've said all you came to say, I wish you'd go back again; I want to go to sleep." At this hint Mr. Rimmon took his leave.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MADELINE'S CHRISTMAS DAY.

MISS LAURA SALTRING had made herself extremely disagreeable to the waif and stray who had found refuge in her father's house. On the very evening of her arrival home, she complained bitterly to her mother that her bedroom would not be her own, as she phrased it, now that Madeline was to share it with her; and she scarcely noticed the blonde girl in the neat black dress, standing nervously in the background. No, we are wrong; she did notice Madeline very much, and mentally compared her with herself, unwillingly to her own disadvantage. Laura's own hair, of which she was very proud, when compared with Madeline's, looked dull and faded, for Madeline's resembled nothing so closely as the finest, brightest, gold-coloured silk that the silkworms weave. It truly shone like a glory round a face whose skin was dazzling. Yes, it could not be denied, Madeline was much prettier than herself. It was not to be endured. It seemed absolutely necessary to say something to Madeline, seeing that she must share the room with her; so Laura remarked to her at the supper-table, "that she had made rather a long visit at Manchester, but that she didn't approve of people making long visits, as people generally got tired of them when they did so." This speech brought a vivid colour into Madeline's transparent skin; and Laura saw with delight that she had wounded her. But Madeline replied—

"I quite agree with you, Miss Saltring; and I think I have already trespassed long enough on your father's kindness. He has been kinder still in not telling me so."

Mr. Saltring, who overheard this, looked exceedingly hurt, and said to Laura—

“Are you forgetting, Laura, that this is my house and not yours, and that Miss Orme is my guest?”

“And is she to supersede your daughter?” replied Laura, very impudently.

This exasperating reply so saddened and humiliated Mr. Saltring that he said—

“My children cannot be superseded, Laura; but after this proof of the manner in which you intend to treat Miss Orme, I shall not subject her to the discomfort of sharing a room with you. So you can go and ask your mother to have a bed put up for you in the nurse’s bedroom.”

“And do you think I’m going to sleep with her?” exclaimed Laura, “and those children sleeping in the next room, with the door open, too, all night?”

“There’s no alternative,” said Mr. Saltring, firmly. “Miss Orme,” he added, turning to Madeline, whose eyelids were quivering with tears ready to drop, “for my sake, and for my dear wife’s, will you forgive the cruel and vulgar conduct of one who has known no trouble, but has been the cause of much?”

Madeline raised her violet eyes, but could not speak.

“I hope Miss Orme won’t consider that I have apologised,” said Laura, hotly, “for I see nothing to apologise for. And do you think it quite decent, Miss Orme,” she added, “to come here in my absence, and artfully gain over my father and my mother, and occupy both my room and my place in the family?”

“No,” broke in Mr. Saltring, sarcastically, “not your place in the family. You deserve that I shall speak, and I will. You never, to my knowledge, did anything to lighten your mother’s burden of household affairs. You have sat hours idle while your mother has toiled. Madeline has, since she came, lightened your mother’s burden so much as to make herself indispensable to us. So if one of you must go, it shall not be Madeline but Laura Saltring.”

“No, Mr. Saltring,” begged Madeline, “let me go. I could not bear to stay after what Miss Saltring has said.”

“Madeline,” replied Mr. Saltring, “do not punish us, my wife and me, for having an ill-mannered and ill-natured child.”

Laura, however, proved intractable. She grew more and more openly disagreeable and insulting to Miss Orme, and at last, finding her father

was not to be moved from his determination to afford shelter to this unhappy wanderer, she one day suddenly broke out as follows to her father :—

"You need not trouble yourself about me any more. I am not going to remain here. I am answering an advertisement for a situation. I shall not stay in this house to have a stranger usurp my place."

"Very well, Laura," said Mr. Saltring, "you shall try it."

"I don't want your permission," rejoined Laura. "I should go if you withheld it, just the same. You have never treated me properly."

"We have not flattered your pride, if you mean that," said Mr. Saltring. "And you, have you treated us well, Laura?"

To this she made no reply.

Two days later Laura Saltring left the house, with a cold good-bye to all except Madeline and her brother Ted. She had obtained her situation.

The mother could not help fretting, though Laura had given her so much trouble of late that it gave her a sense of relief to feel that she had gone out of the house for a time.

"She's safe to come back," said Mr. Saltring to his wife. "She's too idle to keep any situation. You know that."

"But she'll have nothing much to do in this situation," said her mother tearfully.

Mr. Saltring had not allowed his daughter to go, without knowing where and to what she was going. With his usual tender-heartedness, he had gone himself to the place on finding out from his daughter where it was, though he had never mentioned the fact, and had prepared the path for her to some extent by telling the people something of her history and character. He found he had known them before, though he had not recollected it on seeing the name. It was at Mrs. Beredith's at Leamington that Laura was installed.

Madeline on every occasion kept as much in the background as possible, distinguished most by her unobtrusive helpfulness. But when the vicar gave his Christmas Eve party this year, she was prevailed upon to accompany the Saltrings, principally to avoid making herself conspicuous by resisting their importunities. Here, during the performance of a Beethoven sonata for piano and violin, by Miss Towers and the vicar (he had a great idea of elevating the popular taste), Madeline sat with such rapt attention that the eyes of everyone became fixed upon her. Mr.

Rockingham caught her in her listening attitude, and when the sonata was over, ask her if she played.

"I have been accustomed to playing," she replied simply. "Some of my relatives are professional musicians."

She had scarcely uttered these words when she appeared to regret them. Mr. Rockingham saw this, and so led her at once to the piano, and placed before her a volume of Beethoven's sonatas. She sought out the Sonata Appassionata, and rendered the surpassing music with deep feeling. Everyone, even the least educated, present, was impressed, and all agreed that she must not be allowed to stop. Still as simply and as self-forgetfully she commenced "*Les Adieux*." Never was more pathos thrown into the sonata, Mr. Rockingham thought. She made the instrument speak impassioned and plaintive farewells, heart-failings and misgivings, and deep and hallowed affection. But when the theme of the Return broke from her fingers, the joyousness of it excited the vicar, and Amy Towers, and Madame Pelbois, who had in spite of herself drawn near, beyond description. Madeline turned and seeing their marked pleasure, repeated this final movement unasked. Their silent wish thus granted them, caused Mr. Rockingham to reflect that he had never seen such delicacy of feeling in anyone before. He began to be deeply interested in her. When she had finished, he said to her, in a reverential tone—

"You said you had some relatives who were professional musicians, Miss Orme. Why did you not tell me you were one yourself?"

"Because I am not one," said Madeline gravely, and looking without fear into the eyes of the clergyman.

"Really, Mr. Saltring," said the vicar, "how have you possessed yourself of all this talent; and why in the name of charity, have you hidden the light under a bushel?"

"Well," replied Mr. Saltring, rather red, but very good-humoured, "I don't know much about music myself, but it *did* strike me she played very well. But my daughter, who is a bit of a judge, thought otherwise."

Mr. Saltring was redder after having made this remark, for he was conscious of having said more than he had intended. But feeling compelled to say something else now, he added, with all appearance of candour, "I may as well tell you that she sings, or you will say I have hidden that light under a bushel too."

There was a general buzz when this was heard. Everybody was of one opinion. She must sing at once. Her talking voice was so sweet, what must it be when she sang?

"I feel as if I am being shown," said Madeline, with the faint smile which traversed her face rarely. "But since you wish it, I will sing."

There was no need to ask for silence when she sat down once more before the piano. As the vicar had shown so strong a preference for Beethoven, it was "*Adelaïda*" that she chose to sing. She sang it to the Italian words. One woman, a butcher's wife, remarked to one of her friends, "It's the beautifullest thing I ever heard sung. But I can't think the words are very good. They sound Roman Catholic like."

Never had there been such a party at the vicarage. Mrs. Saltring was reconciled to having come; for wasn't this great attraction of the evening her own property, so to speak—to say the least, her importation?

Late that night, Mrs. Saltring entered Madeline's chamber to kiss her favourite again, and make much of her. She found her weeping bitterly; and nothing she could do induced the girl to say why. It was a great trouble to her, but she was compelled by Madeline's entreaties to leave her. And Madeline kept a vigil that night, and made a retrospect of her past, with its harrowing details, against her will. This was her occupation still when the slow winter morning broke; it was Christmas Day.

All eyes were turned on Madeline as she, with the Saltrings, passed up the church aisle on Christmas morning. Those who had been at the vicarage the night before gazed with renewed interest on the musician who had been revealed to them. Something unusual was on the seat Madeline ordinarily occupied. It was an exquisitely bound copy of the Christmas anthems; and Madeline's name was inside the cover, in the vicar's handwriting. Within the book was a bookmark with three ribbons hanging from it; at the end of each was a piece of silver, on which were engraved, though dimly, for the thing was old, the features of a composer.

"Well," whispered Mr. Saltring, "he might have given you something new, at any rate, if he wanted to make you a present."

"Oh, no," Madeline replied. "He has offered me something he values, I am sure of it."

The bell stopped, and the vicar entered and took his accustomed place, not without a glance through his spectacles at the Saltrings' pew. Madeline was holding his present in her hands. Perhaps no one but Madeline knew that he saw this. But it was evident to all the congregation that the vicar was on his mettle; he had never before preached such a sermon. And in the Christmas anthem the perfect voice of the stranger minstrel rose and filled the church.

"You never sang in church before," Mrs. Saltring observed to her as they were going out.

"It was the least I could do," Madeline replied.

At the porch the vicar met them. He shook hands with Madeline last. Instead of thanking him as an ordinary girl would have done, for the gift she had received, Madeline fixed her clear eyes upon him, and softly asked, "Will you tell me to whom that bookmark belonged?"

"I did not expect that question," responded the vicar dreamily, "but I will tell you." And he fell behind the others, and the two walked leisurely between the gravestones, and the dark cloak the girl was wearing brushed his clerical sleeve.

"I am not surprised you asked me, now I think of it," the vicar remarked, glancing at the graves and not seeing them. "I have one sister now, but I once had another. But she was lost. She used to play and sing like you. This bookmark was hers. When I heard you sing *Adelaida* you won it from me. I will tell you some more when I can, if you will let me."

"It is very good of you to trust me," said Madeline, looking meekly down. "I will never part with the bookmark." And then, as if inspired to ask one more question, she inquired, "She did not die, your sister, did she?"

The voice in which he replied, "No," was scarcely audible. They had reached the church gates, and parted on their respective roads.

When she reached home, a new surprise awaited Madeline. A large packet had been left for her during church-time. The writing outside it was identical with that upon the book of anthems in the church. She sat down in a chair, and undid her packet. It was a volume of Beethoven's sonatas, but not a new one; and on the cover was the name "Olive Rockingham."

As the name met her eyes, they dilated. All the household were crowding about her; but she could not refrain from saying, "How strange! How very strange!"

"It is a great compliment," said Madeline, "that he should have given me these. They belonged to his dead sister, or at any rate a lost sister."

"Well, what is there odd in it, then?" said Mrs. Saltring.

"Only this," said Madeline, dreamily turning the leaves of the sonatas, "my mother's name, was Olive."

Mrs. Saltring expected more on hearing this; but Madeline began to draw off her gloves leisurely, then rose and went upstairs.

The plum-pudding had been brought in, all burning, according to old custom ; and a dish of hot mince pies had called forth a shout of glee from the youngsters. This shout covered a cry from Madeline, who was seated opposite to the window, and saw someone pass. That someone rang at the door, and was admitted. A servant came in, and spoke to Mr. Saltring, and gave him a card.

"Strange!" he said ; "I don't know the name at all. Rimpler. Who can he be?"

At the sound of the name, Madeline grew more composed ; "a chance likeness, that was all," she thought.

"Well," Mr. Saltring said to his wife, "I will go and see him, and bring him in. He may as well join us. He'll take a glass of wine at all events. He may possibly have come from a distance." And Mr. Saltring laid his table-napkin upon the table in a heap.

Mrs. Saltring could not help noticing Madeline's peculiar look ; and it passed through her brain in a vague way how queer it was that people's looks should be so different on different days, and resemble people they had nothing to do with. One day Madeline reminded her of Keziah's baby, but now there was a proud look in her face that recalled to her no one so much as Mr. Rockingham. It was odd ; and she unconsciously wondered what had brought it there at this particular moment.

Mr. Saltring's loud voice was soon heard as he approached the door across the hall. The dining-room door swung open. Mr. Rimpler was with him. Madeline did not turn her face. She had never known a Mr. Rimpler. He bore a very strange likeness to someone she had known. She would not look at him.

Mr. Rimpler, for his part, did not notice anyone but Mrs. Saltring, to whom he was introduced, and with whom he entered into conversation.

"You know the people I am with, I believe," he said to her. "I am Mr. Hackbit's clerk, and it is his business that has brought me here to-day, or rather his trouble. He is ill, and Mrs. Hackbit begged me to ask Mr. Saltring to come over. Claret? Yes, thank you."

His glass was filled.

Mr. Rimpler glanced round the table, in the act of raising his glass to his lips.

"Good heavens," he exclaimed—"I mean, good claret."

Everybody stared at him. What did he mean by saying "good heavens," for "good claret," and in such a tone too? But it was quite

clear he had sufficient cause to exclaim, for Miss Orme was in the act of falling from her chair in a swoon. That must have been what startled him. But how odd, then, that he should have said "good claret," after "good heavens."

A great commotion followed, in which Mr. Rimpler made good his escape into another room, explaining, in a not altogether natural voice, that strangers were best out of the way.

He was alone in the drawing-room for some minutes. He struck his hands together two or three times, and said, "Curse it! She's infernally like her. She *is* her! and it's the most unpleasant business. She knew me; that's why she fainted. Con—found it!"

At length a smile broke over his face. "I needn't trouble myself," he thought. "She doesn't seem to know me. Besides, I can swear I've never seen her before; mistaken identity. Very awkward though! I shouldn't care for it to come out that I was a medical student in Germany, and all the rest of it. Wonder where her mother is? By Jove though, she's grown handsomer; and more a fool, probably. She must have been a fool to believe me. I wonder what she'd think, if she knew that the child wasn't dead, after all, but only taken away. It's a very strange coincidence that Mrs. Hackbit's adopted child should have so much of her look. Mere coincidence. It would be a little too much like the penny agonies, if that were to turn out to be the very child. Yet such things have happened. It's so difficult to get at the truth, the woman having left the neighbourhood directly, and taken the child with her. And Mrs. Hackbit says this child was a collier's, who was killed in an explosion, and the mother died of the shock; so the thing seems square enough."

Mr. Saltring entered, and put an end to these reflections.

"How is Miss——the young lady?" asked Mr. Rimpler in a matter-of-fact way, and with no expression of any sort on his face.

"Miss Orme is better now. She is not strong. She has had some excitement this morning; that must be the reason of her fainting. It is not the first time she has done so since she has been with us."

"Has she been with you long?" asked Mr. Rimpler unconcernedly.

"Not very," replied Mr. Saltring; "but we have grown very fond of her, and we hope she won't leave us any more."

Mr. Rimpler devoutly hoped she would, but could scarcely make the remark.

"How long has Mr. Hackbit been so ill?"

"Well, he's been drinking a great deal lately; and I think it's been

coming on him the last few days. There was no keeping him from it. I did my best ; but who am I, to dictate to him ? ”

“ There’s no train for such a long time,” said Mr. Saltring, “ that we must drive. It’s too far for one horse ; but I know a public-house where I can change on the way. I’ve done it before.”

Mr. Saltring’s dog-trap appeared at the door ; and he and Mr. Rimpler got into it, and drove away, Mr. Rimpler remarking upon the frostiness of the air and the slipperiness of the road, in the most natural manner, and not committing the human weakness of looking back.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MR. HACKBIT’S CHRISTMAS DAY.

IT was between five and six o’clock when Mr. Saltring and Mr. Rimpler arrived at Hackbit’s house ; it was dark. There was no light in any of the downstairs rooms facing the street ; but one of the two upper rooms had a light, which shone through dark red curtains.

On entering they were met by Wilson, who ignored Mr. Rimpler altogether, and looked at, addressed, and answered Mr. Saltring only.

The doctor had seen Mr. Hackbit, and had ordered such large doses of laudanum, and so often, that Mrs. Hackbit dared not give them. She was upstairs with Mr. Hackbit, which Wilson did not think proper or safe, as Mr. Hackbit was mad, in her opinion, and wanted a strait-jacket.

Mr. Saltring went upstairs, and Mr. Rimpler remained where he was, for the time, and afterwards went to his own bedroom and sat there.

As Mr. Saltring opened the door of the bedroom, he saw Keziah, terrified and weeping, and Mr. Hackbit in a very menacing attitude. He seemed to recognise Mr. Saltring as he entered, and addressed him at once.

“ I’m glad you’ve come,” he said, with heavy and ill-aimed movements, trying to wipe the perspiration from his brow and face, which was deeply red. “ You will see me righted. They’re in a plot against me. She’s in it,” pointing with a trembling hand towards Keziah. “ The devil’s in it too. And I saw *him* last night looking at the window. They’re all in the plot.”

“ We’ll see it all put right,” Mr. Saltring replied, soothingly. Then turning to Keziah, he said, “ Wilson says you’ve not given the medicine the doctor ordered.”

“ It’s laudanum ,” whispered Keziah, with dilated eyes, “ and so much and so often, I’m afraid.”

"You must not be afraid," said Mr. Saltring. "Let me give it."

Hackbit began to walk about the room unevenly and rapidly. Mr. Saltring steadily dropped the laudanum into a glass. "Come, Hackbit," he said, "drink this."

Hackbit made a step forward, and attempted to grasp the glass, but missed his aim, and his hand closed on air. He was standing close to Mr. Saltring now. His eyes were injected terribly, and looked as if he could not have slept for many nights. Mr. Saltring raised the glass to his lips. Hackbit attempted to hold it, too, but trembled so violently that his teeth chattered against the glass. He swallowed the dose, however.

"I shall be ruined," said he, as soon as he had swallowed it. "They're all in the plot, Saltring. There's that Rimpler, he ferrets everything out. He got to know all about uncle Rimmon and the business in Brum." Here he broke off, and began to strike the air violently. "Take that," he said, "and that." The perspiration was pouring off him now. Mr. Saltring pinioned him, fearing what he would do next.

"Look here," he said, "Saltring. I'm not going to be cut with them knives. I know what you're holding me for."

"You're not going to be cut with any knives," replied Mr. Saltring.

"Well," returned Mr Hackbit, confidentially, "I've killed that fellow three times to-day, and there he is again," and he shook himself free of Mr. Saltring, and plunged towards the mirror, in which was his own reflection, and sent it smashing into the window. Mr. Saltring seized him, but he was not sufficient. Hackbit struggled and raved. Keziah flew from the room, and called Mr. Rimpler. Wilson was on the stair-case.

"Fetch the doctor," Keziah said to her; "the master's worse."

She did not go back into the room. Once free, she dared not return. She just went downstairs and sat in the dark dining-room, in a kind of apathy.

She was startled from her reverie by the doctor's voice. He was asking where she was. She went to him.

"Have you given the laudanum, Mrs. Hackbit, twenty drops every two hours, since I was here?" he asked her.

"Oh, doctor, I didn't dare," said poor Keziah.

The doctor was an abrupt, and not a ladies' man; so he became angry.

"Do you want him to die," he asked, with an aspect of ferocity, "that you don't obey my orders? He would have been asleep now, if you had done what I told you." And with this the doctor walked upstairs, Keziah following.

Mr. Hackbit had in the meantime been fastened to his bed, and had become more violent, though his efforts were ineffectual.

"Just one drink of brandy, Rimpler, come," Hackbit was bawling in his ear. "It would make a man of me again. Look here," he called out to the doctor, "these madmen make me stay out in this graveyard without a drink of brandy to steady my nerves. They can't see those ghosts, but I can. Oh, how their bones rattle! Just one little drink of brandy, and I'll stand it." And he babbled on feverishly. "Look here, my good people, it's not my fault," he called out, "I am only the representative. You didn't borrow the money of me. Look in my pockets. I'm as poor as you. Don't bother me about where you're going to sleep to-night. See, I am in a cold graveyard. I've nothing better."

Mr. Saltring looked at the doctor, who was dropping some more laudanum into the glass.

"He's in a bad way," he said.

"He must get sleep," said the doctor, "at all cost. That fool of a woman didn't give the doses."

Mr. Saltring felt inclined to resent this language. But looking in the doctor's face, he concluded that his bark was worse than his bite.

Hackbit willingly drank out of the glass, but did not appear satisfied. His hands were loosed, and he moved them incessantly in a nervous way against one another, or upon the quilt.

"Are you staying here to-night?" the doctor asked of Mr. Saltring.

"Yes," he replied.

"Then give him the twenty drops again, every two hours until he sleeps. Mrs. Hackbit ought to go to bed. She looks miserably ill. Give her two glasses of port wine."

"Thank you, doctor," said Hackbit. "That's something like. I shall be another man now." Overhearing the words, he supposed the wine was ordered for himself.

Keziah had slipped from the room, but she was standing outside.

"I have ordered you to drink two glasses of port," said the brusque doctor.

"No, no," said Keziah, waving him away with her hand. "Not that, not that terrible stuff, after—after what we've seen. Order me laudanum, like him upstairs; a good dose, and end it all." And she burst into a passion of weeping.

The doctor patted her head, as he might have done a child's with his rough, heavy hand, which could be gentle, it appeared. "You want rest."

And he took her with him downstairs and administered the port wine there and then, and went away, muttering that women were most extraordinary creatures. "Only think of that beast upstairs being cried about, and wanted to live. It seems the worse a man is the more they stick to him."

As soon as he was gone, Keziah saw that a good table was spread for Mr. Saltring, and gave orders to Wilson in reference to the night and things for Mr. Saltring's use and comfort.

Some hours later, when all was hushed in the sick room and Keziah was lying on the couch in the dining-room alone, she saw a figure standing outside, looking up to her window. She sprang up like a child who sees its mother after a long absence. She could not let him go away again without having one word of comfort from him. She did not hesitate a moment. She might have wavered if she had. She flew to Elworthy's side.

"Oh, Rupert," she said in a convulsive whisper. "He's maddened with the drink."

Elworthy held her near him, and muttered something she did not catch.

"You have got some doctor, Kizzy?" he said. "Did he tell you to give laudanum? He must have it to get to sleep, or he will die."

"Oh yes, Rupert," said Keziah, in a low voice, with some fear in it.

"My poor darling," said Elworthy. What else could he say? "You must not remain here another moment; you are trembling." And he added with some vehemence, "If you were ill, who should keep me away? Who is with him now? You've got a nurse, Kizzy?" And he thought with horror of the possibility of his darling having to listen to the ravings of that brute who called her wife.

"Mr. Saltring came, and is with him to-night," she answered.

"God bless and reward him for it," said Elworthy solemnly. "And now, good night." And he said lingeringly, "I shall come again to-morrow, and until this trouble is over You may speak to me or not, as you need." He longed to kiss her, but did not do so. And Keziah found herself lamenting the fact, when she was once more in the darkened dining-room.

But all this time Mr. Silas Rimpler had been keeping a vigil, like the owl in a belfry, widest awake when others are sleeping; and had been in no small degree amused and gratified by the scene that was enacted under his window.

CHAPTER XL.

CHRISTMAS BOXES.

THE following morning, to the utter astonishment of everybody but Mr Saltring, Mr. Hackbit presented a perfectly natural appearance—in fact, seemed quite well. He was not in a good temper, however. Mr. Saltring could not help noticing that Keziah was not being well treated, and he felt that he could not leave the house without speaking of it. He had always been extremely fond of Keziah, and he and Hackbit had had former conversations upon the question of drink, which made it easy for him to speak.

The conversation took place while Hackbit was sitting up in bed, eating his breakfast, at eleven o'clock, for he had slept till then.

"This is a bad job, Hackbit," Mr. Saltring began. "You were going to reform when you married. This is the way you have done it. Don't you think it too bad?"

"That's all you know about it," retorted Hackbit, with a cunning expression. "You see, I thought I was marrying an honest woman, but I have changed my opinion, and see no necessity for being too particular."

"What do you mean, Hackbit?" said Mr. Saltring very indignantly. "Are you aware what you are saying? Do you know that you are attacking one of the best and purest of women by your vile insinuation?"

"Ha!" replied Hackbit. "That kind of language is all very well when you want to write poetry, and when you're in love. I now give it as my opinion that there is no such thing as an honest woman."

Mr. Saltring stared. He could not for the moment reply. At length he said, "You are estimating others by yourself, Hackbit." And then, regretfully, "I used to think there was some good in you, but I don't think it now. A man who can slander that angel wants kicking."

"Look here," said Hackbit, stopping in the conveyance of a spoonful of egg to his mouth, "just you stay here to-night, and watch by this window, and if you don't see that Edmonton—that Elworthy, I mean d--- him—my name isn't Hackbit."

"One of your wild illusions," said Mr. Saltring, defiantly. "And if you think I shall play the spy on your wife, you have made a great mistake. I can trust her."

"Well," said Hackbit, "that, time will show. But if you don't believe my words, ask Rimpler."

"Do you mean to tell me that you've been setting that cur on to spy upon your wife?"

"No, I don't. It was he who told me first. He had seen them together, and seen him lurking about at night, when she hasn't dared to go out to him, I suppose."

"I don't believe a word of it," said Mr. Saltring, mopping his bald head, "and the sooner you get that slanderous villain out of the house, the better. He must have had a good opinion of you, to tell you such a thing. I'll answer for it, nobody would speak to me of my wife so. You are as bad as he is, Hackbit. We can't so easily get rid of you, but you can get rid of him."

"No, I can't," replied Hackbit, shortly.

"Because you want to keep him as a spy, I suppose."

"No, not for that either. I can do my spying myself. But he knows too much of my business to be sent away."

"It must be creditable business, to make you afraid to send him away."

"It's none of your business at any rate; but I tell you one thing, Mr. Saltring, I shall not have you here lecturing me. Every Englishman's house is his castle. So take yourself off. I won't have you in my house another moment, on any pretence whatever. You see I can send you away, if I don't send Rimpler." And Hackbit tore violently at a bell rope near him. It came away in his hand, and dropped upon the bed. Hackbit felt angry enough to have done anything.

Mr. Saltring smiled faintly, and said, "If you were going to ring to have me shown out, you might spare yourself the trouble; I know the way." And he moved towards the door. "This from a man," he thought, "whose life I have probably saved." How much he wished he had kept his temper. This man was master of the house, and of Keziah; and now that he was forbidden the house, he could help Keziah in no way, whatever might happen. He went slowly from the room, followed by a mocking laugh from the bed. When he heard this, and thought of the spirit that prompted it, his heart failed him for the girl who must remain under the same roof; and he thought bitterly, how far from human help a wife was, if her husband should ill treat her.

He had been downstairs to breakfast, and Keziah had become almost cheerful with him at the table to wait upon. She had been so comforted in having him in the house. How should he tell her he was never to come again?

He went to the nursery to look for her. She thought something was wrong, for he did not notice either of the children.

"Kizzy," he said, "come downstairs. I want to speak to you. Heaven knows when I shall get the chance to do that again."

She caught her breath quickly, and waited for him to explain.

"Yes, Kizzy, I am not to come here any more," he said; "I have offended your husband."

She listened, and waited. She could not have spoken if worlds had depended on it. The ground seemed to be taken away piece by piece from under her feet.

"Mr. Saltring," she said at length, with tearless eyes, "do me one great kindness. It is great, I know, and my heart will ache. But I feel now is the moment. I must make the sacrifice. Who knows what tragedy is coming to this house? Dear Mr. Saltring," she said, clutching his hand in both hers, while he looked away from her, "take Bertram home with you. You offered to do it once, and I would not. I thought I was going to do so well for him. I have not the power now. I feel he is not safe under this roof. My husband hates him. If everything must go, why not sooner as well as later? He will cry for me a little, but he will forget soon. You will all be so good to him."

Mr. Saltring had let her go on without replying. Then he turned his face full on her, and, holding her by both shoulders, said, "Get him ready." The smile that broke over the pale face would have been a reward for any man.

She was turning away, when he called her back to remark, "Shall I take both children?"

"No," she said, wistfully, "Lenny is safe enough; he is his father's child."

It was not long before the child was brought; and he seemed very much elated at the thought of going a "yide in a gee-gee." But to the astonishment, and even disgust of Wilson, who was crying, and also of Mr. Saltring and Keziah, the child insisted on saying good-bye to "Rimpy," as he called him.

Some people think that children and dogs can always find out a bad man. We know from experience this is far from being the case. A man who is fond of children, and kind in his manner to them, will always win their regard, be he ever so bad in other respects.

It was a fact that Mr. Rimpler, hearing the child from the office, which was next to the dining-room, came in, looking a good deal cut up

at the thought of parting with him, and seemed really moved as the child flung his arms about his neck.

"Oh, you old hypocrite," said Wilson, under her breath. She was like many others; to her Mr. Rimpler was a prodigy of evil; consequently, she could not believe in his possessing a single trait of goodness.

But the hypocrite went into the office and positively shed a few tears when there was no one to see him. There had been a time in his life when soft arms had been thrown round his neck and he had felt himself the happiest man alive. But now, long years had passed since he had felt them. How these little arms reminded him of that time! At this moment, could he have chosen some definite path of right, he would have gone headlong into it. But he thought of no direct course. And a vague wish to do better rarely ends in much good.

Keziah did not cry when she parted with her darling. She was filled by the thought that she was sending him to happiness and safety. She had made a great sacrifice, but she felt herself to be the gainer.

A box of clothes was to be sent on, and nothing went with the child but one little box containing immediate necessities.

Mr. Hackbit having got out of bed, saw the trap drive off, and understood the case at once; and though inwardly glad, he decided to be outwardly vexed. His bell-rope was off, he could not ring; so he slipped on some of his clothes as quickly as he could, and went downstairs in a way that would have startled anybody that saw him.

He found Keziah and Wilson drying their eyes in the dining-room. This suggested a revenge that must be effective.

"So, Keziah, you have thought fit to send Bertram away without consulting me. Now there is only one child, there is no need for Wilson: " this with an evil light in his eyes. "You can occupy yourself with attending to Leonard. Then perhaps you will get to care a little bit for your own child. You've a month's notice from to-day, Wilson."

Wilson's red eyes flashed, and she flung out of the room.

"Why do you do it?" said Keziah. "Why do you send everybody away who is kind to me?"

"To please myself," said her husband coldly. "You have more to learn yet, Keziah. Do you think it safe to trifle with me?"

"I do not trifle with you," returned Keziah steadily.

"You lie," replied her husband. "Perhaps you would like me to send you away from the house, and give you an excuse to do what you want to do. Well, you shall not have your wish. You shall stay here, and wait

on me, and obey orders. Don't think it's because I'm so fond of you. But I've a right over you, and here you stay."

"You treat me like a slave," said Keziah.

"You shall know more of what that means," said her lord, and left her.

Mr. Rimpler had heard this conversation, as anybody might have done who had been in the office at the time. And when Hackbit, having left his wife, joined him, he was moved to say, having just had better feelings.

"You've been too hard on Mrs. Hackbit. In spite of all we've seen I don't believe any harm has been done ; and I don't believe Mrs. Hackbit would ever do any harm. She has done no worse than speak to him. That's my opinion, and I know the world."

"Oh, you are clever, we know that," retorted Hackbit. "You set the match to the fire and now it has grown as big as a house, you expect a bucket of water to put it out. The game doesn't pay. Do you want her yourself, that you begin to defend her? Go and ask her to go away with you ; she would if you ask her."

"No, she wouldn't," said Rimpler coolly ; "and I would never ask her."

"Oh, you are both angels from heaven, I know," sneered Hackbit. "But about the business, Rimpler. You'll have to be more cautious. If you ruin people wholesale, we shall get into the papers. You sold up an awful number of families last month ; and in one neighbourhood, too. They'll get talking together, and then it'll get into the papers, and they'll find out who it is that's the real money-lender, and it will be ruination."

"It wouldn't be you ruined ; it would be Mr. Rimmon," said Rimpler.

"And isn't that me?" retorted Hackbit, snappishly. "Don't I mean to have his money some time ? He may make it a good deal more if he keeps dark a few years longer."

"If you go on drinking as you have been lately, you'll die first. You've drunk yourself into *delirium tremens* about as soon as any man I have ever seen."

Everybody in the house was surprised to see Mr. Hackbit go off to Birmingham that day, except the doctor, who said that opium had often done as much in cases of *delirium tremens*.

Mr. Hackbit had scarcely left the house, when Keziah put on her things and went up to her mother's. She was not away long ; but Mr. Rimpler noted the time when she left, and the time of her return, in a mechanical sort of way. When he heard her come into the next room,

after she had returned, he opened the door of communication, and addressed her in a way he meant to be kind, but he received a chilling rebuff.

"Oh, very well, my fine lady," said Mr. Rimpler. "The day may not be far distant when you will regret not having taken Silas Rimpler for a friend."

"You haven't it in you to be a friend to anybody," retorted Keziah, and quitted the room.

It was on account of this rebuff that Mr. Rimpler, on Hackbit's return, reported Keziah's having been out, and added a little to it on his own account. Consequently, when Hackbit went up to bed and found his wife with her head already on the pillow, he ordered her to get up, and told her to go and sleep in the spare room, by herself.

She obeyed in a bewildered dream, and crept from the room, carrying some of her clothes with her, and feeling that when Wilson was gone she would indeed be at the mercy of two villains. There was no bed prepared in the spare room. The bed that belonged to it was kept under another when out of use. But what did it matter? She laid herself wearily upon the mattress, and covered herself with the clothes she had brought, and lay awake all night.

The following morning, Keziah dressed herself and went down early. Hackbit appeared at the usual hour. Keziah glanced at him as he entered the breakfast-room. He knew it, though he did not look at her. He had his dressing-gown on, and he seated himself at his end of the breakfast table, and took up the newspaper which lay folded on his plate.

The servant brought in the coffee. Keziah commenced to pour it out. She passed her husband his cup. He put down his paper and helped himself to a chop, but did not offer any such attention to Keziah. She did not want anything, but a certain pride in her would not give in, and allow him to think she had no appetite. Besides, Mr. Rimpler would be in directly, and she did not mean him to see her with an empty plate before her. So she walked to her husband's end of the table, and helped herself under his very nose.

She came into such close quarters that Hackbit felt obliged to speak to her, though not by any prompting of courtesy.

"I hope you have spent a good night," he said, satirically, "and that you feel refreshed and all that sort of thing."

"I thank you," said Keziah, with mock politeness. "The question is rather unnecessary, seeing that it was passed away from you. Yes, I slept very well, thank you, much better than usual."

Mr. Rimpler here made his appearance, rubbing his hands together, which were red with cold. He looked at Hackbit first, then at Keziah; and after a curt good morning—they never shook hands—he remarked, as if taken unawares, "I think Mrs. Hackbit looks in need of a doctor."

"Not at all," remarked her husband, "she has just been saying how well she is."

Keziah would perhaps have replied herself, but she was seized with a fit of coughing.

"Pretty well done," observed her husband, "seeing you are not on the stage."

Keziah began to eat her breakfast in a kind of desperation, but the effort to swallow seemed great. Rimpler furtively watched her. Hackbit tried not to do so, but failed.

"Oh," he said, getting up from the table at last, "I can't sit at the table to see you swallowing your breakfast like a dog does dumplings."

"Then go away, if you don't want to see me," said Keziah.

All this could not go on without some comments being made in the kitchen.

Both the cook and the gardener had agreed that Wilson had been ill-treated by Hackbit in having received notice, and had commiserated her. Thus it happened that the elderly female began to have a better opinion of the other domestics. This morning on entering the kitchen she closed the door, and said to the cook—

"Do you know where the missis slept last night?"

"No," answered the cook.

"She slept in the spare room, with no bed and no covering."

"What a shame!" cried the cook and Roberts, the gardener, simultaneously.

"I dread going," said Wilson. "Who will there be to look after the missis when I'm gone! And she's not a bit fit to look after Leonard."

"He is a brute," said Roberts, "as ever lived; and it's much to me if Rimpler doesn't get a match for him, before he's done; and serve him right too."

"Well," said the cook, "if you do go, I shall look after the baby. I shan't let her. It's a sin and a shame; and he's as rich as a Jew, I do believe."

"I shall write to Mrs. Towers, and tell her all about it to-day," said Wilson, following her own thoughts, rather than answering. "And I shall let Mr. David Rimmon know, too. It's no use telling her father. He won't hear anything against Mr. Hackbit."

"And when you've told them," said Roberts, "what can they do?"

"They might get a separation."

"Them articles aren't so easy got as you seem to think," said Roberts. "You've never tried to get one, mayhap."

"Of course not," said Wilson, "how should I? But what's that got to do with it?"

"Well, a good deal," replied the gardener.

CHAPTER XLI.

COMFORT FROM OTHERS' WOES.

WHILE Wilson was writing to Mrs. Towers, and to David Rimmon, another letter was being written to David, that might bring him to Jumley. The writer was Joshua Rimmon.

This is what Joshua wrote :—

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—This is the season when there ought to be goodwill towards men in all our hearts. Ever since my marriage, I have gathered my kinsfolk about me on New Year's Eve. Why break this sacred chain? [Mr. Rimmon liked this phrase, and felt himself waxing eloquent.] I would not rob you of my boy whom you have adopted, and who, I trust, may prove a blessing and a comfort to you in your declining years. Yet would I not have him a stranger to his father's house, an alien and an outcast. Therefore, I pray you, bring him and join my simple board for the New Year's Eve, and believe me,

"Your forgiving brother,

"JOSHUA RIMMON."

When David received this, he became greatly excited. He read it before Wilson's, which lay on the table. Jubal was reading a sporting paper he took in, and expressed but little interest in a letter from his father. David handed it to him when he had read it three times.

"Dear me," broke forth Jubal, having perused it with elevated eyebrows; "a masterpiece of rhetoric and hypocrisy!"

"I should hardly say that," said David mildly. "The command that we shall not judge, that we be not judged, means that we are not to put people down as meaning wrong when we don't understand their actions."

"I find no difficulty at all in understanding," returned Jubal, tenderly touching his wavy hair, and looking at it in a mirror opposite. "He thinks people in Jumley will talk if he doesn't have anybody for New Year's Eve ; and there's nobody to come but Dorcas and Keziah and us, and my most respected brother-in-law, who will probably refuse to dance attendance on that occasion."

"Of course I cannot control you," said David mildly ; "but, for myself, I cannot pray, 'Forgive me my sins as I forgive those who sin against me,' and refuse at the same time to forgive my brother."

"He has never asked you to forgive him," said Jubal, a cynical smile breaking over his face.

"Well, no," replied David, colouring a little. "Now I think of it, he hasn't. Still, his ways aren't like ours ; he never was like other people ; and I think he means it all right. But I think that it's no part of my work to sift and sift, and find out if he means all he says. That's the work of a higher than me. But it is for me to forgive seventy times seven, and to live peaceably with all men, so far as in me lies ; and I shall go to Jumley."

"You're not a bit of a man, uncle," said Jubal superiorly, "or you wouldn't be taken in as you are."

"I'm afraid I am cowardly ; it has always been my fault," said David simply. "But I don't think I mean to be cowardly in this." And he took up the other letter and looked at the address.

"I don't know this writing," he observed. "I wonder who it is."

"Why don't you open it and see ?" said Jubal rather rudely.

His uncle silently opened the letter.

"Oh, Jubal," he said, with a kind of cry. "Poor Keziah !"

"What's the matter with her ?" Jubal asked, rather indifferently.

"This is from her nurse-maid, Wilson ; she says that Thomas is frightfully ill-treating her. I am astonished."

"I'm not. She shouldn't have married him. She made her bed ; let her lie on it."

"I wonder how you can talk so," said David, in a tone as nearly approaching anger as he had ever used to Jubal. "One would think you had no affection at all for her, your own sister."

"She shouldn't have played the fool. I was all right with her before."

"Jubal," said his uncle, deprecatingly, "is this the time to reproach her with a false step?"

"I'm not going to reproach her. I shall not go near her. But I'm not sure I won't go home, if it's only to see the mother. She was always decent enough."

"I think it is your duty to go home, now your father calls you. And I think it's your duty equally to be kind to your sister, who has certainly always been good to you, and who is sorely in need of a kind friend just now. You could be more to her than anybody else, if you liked. You ought to go, Jubal."

"Ought stands for nothing. If I go home, I don't think I shall open my lips to my father. I shall certainly not go near Keziah."

"Well, well," said David Rimmon. "I do wish I had somebody to advise me." And it passed through his mind how good an adviser Maud Towers would have been, had he been free to go to her. But he was not.

At the same hour Maud was equally perplexed with David, and the same subject was before her notice. She did not take long to consider her action. She wrote to Keziah :—

"MY DEAR, DEAR KEZIAH,—I have heard to-day, with a pain that shows me how dear you are to me, of the sea of trouble which surrounds you and threatens to overwhelm you. One sad consolation I have to offer, and you will, I fear, say this is none. For in suffering for each other, we do but increase each other's load. You are not alone. If you are overwhelmed, so am I. How came we both to make such mistakes? Our lots, though different, are strangely alike, except in one thing. You looked for a calm life with your cousin : I looked for bliss. You have missed the calm and found tumult. I have missed supreme happiness, and found supreme misery. Perhaps this does not sound like sympathy ; yet as I write my heart bleeds for you. I find myself always sighing for the days when you and I quarrelled at my fireside, and were so very, very happy, and did not know it. None know what happiness is, but those who have lost it for ever. We are both of us so young, Kizzy, it does seem hard that we should look with longing eyes to the time when death shall release us from our many sorrows. I can only think of that ; and yet, it is not *happiness* in another life that I look for,

only rest from this torment ; for how can I expect the love that has died upon earth, and left my living love clinging to its corpse, to rekindle in another world ? It will not happen. Eternal love that men talk about does not exist. What cause have I ever given to him that he should turn from me ? He never spends a moment in my company he can help. We have no business connection now, even. For I have ordered all the rents to be paid into his hand long ago, and I take just what he doles out to me. I often walk in the cemetery you and I looked at together one day. You remember we said we would not go there again ; it made us sad. Now, it comforts me just a little, for I look at the white stones and the fresh grassy mounds and I think, 'This is a home where I may rest some day—sooner, perhaps, than I dare hope.' I felt a bit hurt at first when I heard that Bertram had gone to Mr. Saltring's. I would have been so glad of him : but you know best. It will surprise you to hear that I never paint anything now, and I never touch the piano. You may ask, 'How do I employ my time, then ?' I don't think I know. I can't think of anything just now that I am in the habit of doing. I hope you have not thought it unkind of me not to have written to you before ; but I had no good news to send, and I did not wish to sadden you. I could not write to you and pretend all was right, when it was so far, far from being the case. But now nothing I can send you could make you more miserable than my silence. I feel very thankful to Wilson for having written ; please tell her so from me.

"Lionel is in a dreadful way about me. He can't help seeing how things are, though I have told him nothing. You know, I suppose, that Gerald is with Dr. Elworthy. They get on together very well ; but Gerald never comes here. He must have seen and understood in his one visit.

"Tom went in for his examination again, and got plucked. When he came and told me, he said I need not fear ; he would fulfil the condition that I had made for him on marrying him. To think of my being interpreted in that way, Kizzy ! You know it was for him, and him alone, I wanted him to get his qualification. What could it matter to me ? What can anything matter to me now, since he does not love me, and never, never will again ? If I had said anything like that to you in the old days when we were together, you would have shaken that small head of yours, and made me some saucy answer. I wonder if you ever make saucy answers now to anyone. I cannot bear to imagine you as always grave ; it seems so unnatural. But perhaps it is as difficult for you to

imagine me wandering about in an aimless way, existing from day to day, not living, not caring a bit what I put on, nor how I look. But I do know that nothing I put on, nothing I could put on, could make me look pretty, as you used to think me. I have grown very thin, and my eyes always look heavy and dull; it must be sleeping so little and crying so much, I suppose. But enough of this. You used to say I was unreasonable. If I could only have you again all to myself, I don't think I should be so unreasonable. Trouble makes such changes in one. Tom is changed; his hair is turning quite grey. And now, dearest Kizzy, let us be all in all to each other, though it be only in thought and at a distance.

"Your faithful friend,

"MAUD."

When Keziah received this letter she had a brief moment of rest from her own sorrows in thinking of her friend's. "Ah," she thought, "however bitter my lot is, Maud's is worse: I am only separated from the man I love, and am ill-treated by the man who is my husband; but Maud has lost the love of the man she still loves and who once loved her. Yes, that is worse." She could picture it. She had only to think what it would be like to have married Rupert and then to have lost his love.

CHAPTER XLII.

MR. RIMMON LOSES MORE THAN HIS TEMPER.

KEZIAH did not answer Maud's letter at once, for she had other matters in hand. She had promised to go in and help her mother in preparing for the New Year's Eve festivities which were to come off as usual. Mr. Hackbit had been persuaded by his father-in-law to join the party, just to keep up appearances. Whether he would actually do so or not was still a question. He was not drinking so much; he had had a fright. How long this would last was doubtful. He made no objection to Keziah's going in to assist her mother, telling her politely that her room was better than her company.

Keziah's spirit rose against this insult, and she determined to fight hard to look as if all were right, and not give him the pleasure of cowing her. She entered her father's house by the back way, and went into the

kitchen. There was Mrs. Rimmon in a large apron, tying the puddings up, ready to put into a pot that was boiling on the fire.

"This grate's worse than ever this year," Mrs. Rimmon began, "and now the boiler's cracked, and we can get no hot water. Just as if there wasn't worry enough, without that. And I'm sure I don't think any of the fuss as is made is worth while. Who wants to come here?"

"Never mind, mother," returned Keziah. "It is not worth making a bother about; you should get hardened. Give people their deserts. If the dinner gets spoiled, don't you trouble your head about it. It's no good people worrying themselves into the grave because they can't please people who are unpleasable." She had been taking off her things while she spoke, and turning up her sleeves, in readiness to be of use. "What shall I do first, mother?" she asked.

"Well, Kizzy," said her mother, "if you'd just make a bit of paste for a mince pie for your father's dinner—he'll expect one."

"And is nobody else to have one?" broke in Keziah, sharply.

"Not to-day," said Mrs. Rimmon. "You see, we shall all get some on New Year's Eve."

"All right," rejoined Keziah. "If no else is to have any, he shan't have any either."

"If you won't make it for him, I must," said Mrs. Rimmon, resignedly.

"Don't be so stupid, mother. Tell Grumps you asked me to do it, and I wouldn't."

"Oh, Kizzy," said Mrs. Rimmon, beginning to cry. "There is always a plenty of wasps flying about, without stirring up a wasp's nest."

"Indeed," retorted Keziah, amused. "And if the wasps' nests are left alone, the more wasps will be flying about."

"Well, those as stir them up are sure to get stung," said Mrs. Rimmon.

"Well, what does it matter," said Keziah, "if they don't ask other people to bear the smart for them?"

"I have heard of people being stung to death," returned Mrs. Rimmon, who had got deep in the metaphor, and rather astonished herself.

"I am one of the people that would rather be stung to death at once than be pestered by occasional stings for years, and years, and years."

There was more in this than Mrs. Rimmon could see, for she, in common with others of the human race, was thinking of her own situation more than of her daughter's.

When half-past one came, Mr. Rimmon arrived, and demanded his dinner. A cloth was laid for him on the end of the dining-room table, and

further than this he could see no preparation, so he came into the kitchen to view the land. He caught sight of his daughter. It had been to him some satisfaction that Keziah was caged; but he had never lost his fear of her. So when he saw her there, he did not break forth as he would otherwise have done.

"What do you want?" Keziah asked sharply.

"Well, my dinner," replied her father.

"Well, the quieter you keep about it, the sooner you'll get it."

What was the use of his remaining in the kitchen? None at all. He went back to the dining-room, and took up a volume of Wesley's sermons and scanned it morosely. He had not to wait long. Keziah with her own hands brought a tray in, and to Mr. Rimmon's infinite astonishment, she placed between his knife and fork, a plate with a few thin slices of cold meat upon it.

"What's this, Kizzy?" he said eyeing the plate from where he sat, with much disfavour.

"It's your dinner," said Keziah, "and the sooner you eat it the better."

Mr. Rimmon seated himself at the table, but did not begin to eat the meat. He was thinking that he would make his dinner off the mince-pie that was to follow. He waited a long time, but nobody came. He rang the bell. Sarah answered it.

"Take this away," he said, pointing at the plate, "and bring the mince-pie in."

"There's no mince-pie," said Sarah, half afraid.

"No mince-pie!" said Mr. Rimmon, with a stop after each syllable.

On hearing this, Mr. Rimmon got up from the table with the intention of going without any dinner. There was an iron safe in the wall of the room, and he unlocked it, intending to get some papers out. He put the door hurriedly to as he heard some one come in. He thought it was Keziah, and resolved not to speak to her. But it was his sister Dorcas.

Her brother looked at her, and wondered what on earth had brought her there. Her face was beaming.

"What do you think, Joshua?" she said.

"I don't know," answered Joshua, very indifferently.

"That wretch Brougham Banner's son has been drowned; one of the twins, you know."

Having imparted her news, she waited. As her brother did not speak, she said—

"Are you not going to say anything, Joshua?"

"Yes," he answered. "Go about your business."

"Oh, indeed," said Miss Dorcas, swaying her head up and down, "I must go about my business, must I? And is it any part of your business to send me about my business? answer me that."

"I tell you I don't want to be bothered with you," said Joshua irritably.

"Oh, and you're ready to use me," said his sister, "and also abuse me, so it seems. But let me tell you one thing, there's a dog on your track. Ha!" she said, "I thought you'd show some interest at that piece of news. Only last night, sir, I heard a man call you a whited sepulchre."

This scriptural phrase stabbed Joshua deeply.

"Was it a Jumley man?" he asked.

"That's my business, and I'll mind it."

"What do you want to be such a fool for?" said her brother. "If anybody said such a thing, I ought to know who it is. Would you let the ground be taken from under my feet, and never give me warning?"

"Measure for measure," said Miss Dorcas. "The measure you mete shall be measured to you again."

"Well," said her brother, with a grim smile, "my ruin would be your ruin, thank Heaven."

"Ho, ho," laughed Dorcas. "When a house falls there's always somebody on the look-out to carry the treasure away. What if the one who carries the treasure away should marry *me*?"

All the anxiety died out of Mr. Rimmon's face on hearing this. "A mare's nest," he said. "I know whom you mean." And he laughed satirically, locked up his iron safe, and was leaving the room, when the key dropped from his pocket on to the cushioned chair, and he did not hear it. He went back to his bank laughing to himself.

No sooner had he gone right away from the house than Dorcas gleefully seized the key. "Oh, Silas, my dearest," she cried, "my time has come at last." And she opened the safe, having previously locked the door, just as Joshua Rimmon had done in the hour when he betrayed Rupert Edmonton. Somehow the words she had just used to her brother came into her mind, she did not know why—"The measure ye mete shall be measured unto you again." Had she known all about the treacherous deed her brother had been guilty of, the words would have been ominous enough. But she did not.

Having taken a certain bundle of papers out of the safe, she placed the key on the leather chair, where it had fallen. So it happened that

when Joshua came home and his eyes fell upon the key, a cold sweat broke out upon him ; and a great feeling of gratitude came into his heart, he hardly knew to what or whom, to fate most probably, that he and no other had found the key. It never occurred to him in any form that it might have been found and used.

That night Dorcas Rimmon waited in the shadow of a ruined engine-house in the Old Park. A keen wind was blowing, and she stared as far as she could along the dark path that led between worked-out mines towards her brother's house. But, wearied by the intense darkness, she turned her eyes away to rest upon the dim lights of the town and the glare of the furnaces. A figure of a man was approaching between her and one of the lights. Could it be Silas, coming another way ? He might have been somewhere for Thomas, and so have been unable to keep his appointment.

The man was passing her. "Perhaps he can't see me," thought Dorcas. She stepped out a little. "Silas," she said, in a sharp whisper. The man turned upon her and scanned her.

"What are you prowling about for?" said a husky voice. . . . "That is the expression you use in this country ? *Oh Ciel*, what a country it is."

Dorcas retreated into the shadow. But she was not so easily quit of the stranger, who followed her.

"And was it for me you were waiting ?" he said, in a charming manner. "I took you for a pit-bank worker, as they call them in this heathenish land. But I see you are respectable. These pit-bank workers, they will give you a kiss, but they do smell of the coal. But you smell sweetly of the lavender-water. It is a shame you should wait here in solitude. I will bear you company."

"Are you a stranger to these parts ?" asked Miss Dorcas, hoping this stranger would stay until Silas Rimpler came up, to excite his jealousy and so increase his ardour.

"Yes, I am a stranger to these parts," replied the gentleman. "But I will know the neighbourhood better if you permit me."

"Oh," thought Dorcas, delighted, "he thinks the neighbourhood belongs to me !" She wondered what this stranger was like, it being too dark to distinguish his features.

"Are you intending to stay here," asked Dorcas sweetly, "for any time ?"

"I stay," replied the stranger, "wherever soft arms detain me. But

at present it is at Wolverhampton I am, amusing the public, which is not very elevated, it does appear to me."

"May I ask you where are you going now?"

"I was going up to a Mr. Hackbeet's, on a little matter of business."

"Oh, he is my nephew."

"Your what? *Oh Ciel!* Then you were the youngest of the family, is it not, come to brighten the old age of your esteemed mamma and papa?"

"No, I am not the youngest," replied Dorcas. The ardour of the gentleman seemed to go down considerably, and he bade her a cool good-night.

As he was departing, not taking particular notice of his footing, he threw himself into the arms of Silas Rimpler, who was advancing from the opposite direction.

"What the devil are you about?" jerked out Mr. Rimpler, catching his breath and staggering.

"*Mille pardons*, my good friend," said the foreigner. "It is as dark as the grave, this country of yours. I am despair to find my way to Mr. Hackbeet's."

"The way isn't through me," responded Mr. Rimpler irately, and imagining for some reason that he recognised the voice. "What do you want with Mr. Hackbit? I belong to that firm."

"Well, I am come to Wolverhampton," replied the foreigner confidentially, "to do some conjuring performances. They are not elevated people at all; they will not give up a room but I must pay first; and the printer, he will not print my bills until I do first pay him. Is this not strange? And I am absolutely without the means to pay till I have performed. I am without watch, and many other things, which Monsieur the pawnbroker is in possession of, at the last place I am in; and a kind gentleman to whom I explained my difficulty has told me you are agent for a money-lending firm."

Rimpler thought, "Hackbit wouldn't be too pleased to have his private address given," and wondered who could have done it.

"It would not matter so much," the foreigner went on, "but I have an incumbrance with me, in the shape of a woman who is no longer young, and no longer pretty, who, like the cherubim in your Church prayers, 'continually doth cry;' and he waited evidently expecting pity on this point; but Mr. Rimpler only laughed. "I see you have never been in a like situation or you would not laugh. It is no matter for laughter, I will assure you."

"That's all you know about it. Why don't you get rid of the woman?"

"I have already done so many times, but she has a fine instinct, she. She comes again; and so, if she were in her grave, she would come again, that woman."

"All right," said Rimpler; "you go on up that way," vaguely indicating, "and I'll follow you."

"If you have no objection, I will wait for you. It is not inviting, that road. I have been everywhere, but never have I seen something like this."

"But I have an objection. You won't hurt yourself. Foreigners are always so nesh." He had picked up that word in the neighbourhood.

"If you do not object," said the foreigner, "you will be so good as to lead me to a place of safety, a little further on, where I will remain while you speak with Ma'em'selle."

Rimpler was furious. "Confound you," he said, "what do you mean?"

"Oh, I thought the Ma'em'selle was waiting for some one, by that piece of building."

"It isn't for me, at all events," said Rimpler, telling a lie.

"Oh, then, if it is not for you, I will tell you, I have spoken with her, but she is no chicken, she."

Rimpler was thinking, "How could he have found that out in the dark?" and said so.

"There was nothing of shyness in her manner," said the foreigner; "and I did gather from other indications——"

Rimpler decided that Dorcas should wait it out that night, and went on with the foreigner to Hackbit's, where a loan was arranged.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A COSTLY RELIEF.

THE little matter of business Monsieur Pelbois had to transact with Mr. Hackbit was arranged actually in that gentleman's absence. Keziah had been up at her mother's all day, so Mr. Hackbit took the opportunity of looking over all her belongings, imagining that he might discover some preparations for flight. But in this he was disappointed.

He found nothing in Keziah's orderly drawers and boxes but the most natural and ordinary things. Inconsistent as it must appear, he was angry at not finding what he had sought ; and a resolve came into his mind, without his being perfectly conscious of it. If people put themselves in a frame of mind to do a thing, they are pretty sure to find an opportunity, and themselves prepared to act.

Hackbit's opportunity came this night. Keziah had returned in time for supper, which had been put off owing to Mr. Rimpler's and Mr. Hackbit's non-appearance. Silas and Monsieur Pelbois came in first, and remained in the office some time, the foreigner going away before Hackbit's return. That gentleman made a great noise in the entrance hall when he did come, and to all appearance had been drinking again. He came in smiling, just as he always smiled when he was going to do anything remarkably offensive.

"Well, Rimpler," he said sarcastically, "I hope you are enjoying my wife's society."

Rimpler made no reply. Keziah bit her lip, and looked angry.

"You know the stock she comes of, Rimpler," he went on. "One of them, whose Scripture knowledge is great, said something about not gathering figs from thistles. I wish I had thought of that when I married my wife. We're all fools till we learn. I took her for a saint. You know what she is, Rimpler. Did you ever see a man so infernally sold?"

Keziah fixed her black eyes with wrathful intensity on Hackbit's face. "What do you want to goad me to do?" said she.

"Is there anything you are anxious to be goaded into doing?" replied Hackbit, seating himself in a chair, and tipping it up on the hind legs.

Keziah looked as if about to quit the room ; but she changed her mind, and sat down. She would not have done so had she known what would follow.

"Have you ever heard the story about my wife, Rimpler?" went on Hackbit, insolently. "She had a situation at Leamington, and managed to get over the medical man in attendance at the house, who was subsequently taken up on a charge of murder. She then laid her traps for me, and here I am. Anyone might pity me."

"How dare you insult me so !" broke out Keziah. She left the room, followed by insolent laughter. She did not appear again that night. A bed had been prepared for her properly in the spare room, since the night she had lain there on the bare bedstead.

Hackbit went to bed rather early, for him. But Mr. Rimpler had no notion of going to bed. He had seen Keziah a few days ago place a sheet of white paper under some stones. He examined it : nothing was written on it.

He had sat in his room silently for a long time, when he heard a creaking upon the stairs. Somebody was going down ; of course, it was Keziah. He waited some time patiently ; but he did not see her appear outside. He thought to himself, if she had gone to meet that fellow Elworthy, they must have gone round to the back of the house ; so he determined to go round and reconnoitre. The house was quite still. He thought he might venture to do it.

The landing window lay between the room where Keziah was now sleeping and the night nursery. He thought, if they were in the garden behind, he should hear as well as see from this position. It was his habit when he went into a new house to try all the locks and all the windows, to learn if they had any peculiarity of opening and shutting. This he always managed to do in a natural manner. Consequently, he had ascertained that the landing window would open without a sound, though his own would not. So he very quietly raised the window, and put his head out.

He could see nothing, it was so dark. But then, he argued, "If I can see nothing, the same darkness renders me invisible to others, which is also something." Yes, there was some one moving below, and the sound of low voices.

"I am afraid to stay in the same house with him," he heard Keziah say. "Yet if I freed myself, and went away from him, then he and all the world would say it was to go to you, which I would never do, except as now."

A low voice answered, "Is my reputation worth more to me than you are, Kizzy? You must come to me, if you have so much reason to fear. And why not? These laws are men's laws, and not God's. You are mine by right. What does it matter what people say? You would go away, far from the reach of their voices. It could not matter to you then."

"If no one knew, I should know," was Keziah's reply. "No, I will never do that. If I leave my husband's roof, you must promise me faithfully you will never see me or speak to me again."

She was so earnest that he could not but promise. But he felt in his heart he had promised more than he could perform. In the battles of the soul it is a question of the right of the strongest ; and love for Keziah,

and desire to possess her, were stronger this time with poor Elworthy than any man-made laws.

Silas, who had heard every word of this, felt he had been having a very good time ; and as they ceased talking, and appeared to separate, he slowly began to put down the window.

But something happened that made him stop suddenly in the operation. Something appeared to fly at him, and was pouring down upon him. He was taken so much unawares that he could not help crying out, whereupon he was seized by the throat and hair, and shaken about as if he had been a pillow : after which he was flung upon the landing, and received the contents of a bucket, which nearly choked him. He could do nothing but utter inarticulate sounds. Nor did the experience terminate as yet. Suddenly he felt himself being dragged, in the darkness, along the landing and into his own room. Then a voice for the first time accosted him. It was Wilson's. "Take that for a lesson, you sneaking eaves-dropper," she said ; "and tell anybody about it if you wish to"—this in a tone that showed Silas plainly she was acute enough to know he would say nothing about it.

He dragged himself up from the floor after a moment or two, and struck a match. His door was shut. He heard a wiping of something going on outside, and concluded Wilson was wiping up the spilt water. He lit his candle, and remembered savagely that he had been unable to utter a word or do anything, and wished he had the time over again. But it is only on the stage that badly-acted scenes can be gone over again.

Mr. Rimpler slowly and with some of his ordinary manner advanced towards the glass, and looked at himself, which he continued to do for some minutes. His face had assumed its normal brick-wall expression. At length he began:—

"Item No. 1, cravat missing ; item No. 2, black mark on left eye ; item No. 3, portions of hair missing ; item No. 4, shirt front torn out—as near as possible," he added ; "item No. 5, large lump on back of head, can't see it, can feel enough to make up for that ; item No. 6, a dreadful feeling along the vertebræ, from top to bottom, indescribable, can't see that either ; item No. 7, a large piece of cuticle missing under black eye, will necessitate a piece of plaister ; item No. 8," he said, as he began to take off his clothes, "every one of my things as wet as if I'd been swimming in them ; item No. 9, can feel another lump coming out over the left eye ; item No. 10, an infernal headache. All this to be put on paper."

Having divested himself of all his clothes, Mr. Rimpler wrapped

himself in a blanket, and wrote down his list of items in his pocket-book, to be remembered against Wilson for ever ; and while he wrote, Wilson had cleared away all the mess, and was anxiously waiting for Keziah to come in. And now that her exertions were over, and that she had had the pleasure she had longed for, of giving it to "that Rimpler," a feeling of depression came over her. She had heard Keziah's voice below. "Then it is true," she thought, after all. "What a pity !" And she waited and watched for Keziah's coming in. But Keziah was at that moment being persuaded never to come in any more and she was wavering.

But she and Rupert had heard the cry, though they had not recognised the voice ; and they thought they had been discovered. Keziah had clung desperately to Rupert's arm and he held her firmly.

"Come away, Kizzy, my dear love, while there is yet time. If you go he will murder you, now he has discovered. Why should you throw yourself into the jaws of death at random, and ruin my life too, for such a villain as he is ? What could the world say against you ? They know what he is. Kizzy," he pleaded, "you who are so brave, and have dared so much. Come, dare the world's opinion, and go with me. I have plenty of money. I could get a practice abroad, easily. Think, let love decide, to whom do you owe allegiance ? To that man, who has done nothing to earn it ; or to me, who am ready to do everything for your sake ? You trusted yourself to him ; can you not trust yourself to me ? Think, Kizzy, of all you have made me suffer. Can you imagine what my feelings must have been, to come out of prison to find the one who should have been true to me, though all else had failed—to find you belonging to another ? Do you not owe me anything, Kizzy, for loving you so after all this ? But you must decide now, this very moment. Someone will be here. You must decide between him and me." And not waiting for a reply, he led her with his strong arm about her, down the garden path and out at the gate.

She had been scarcely conscious of anything but the strength of what he said, till now that she was moving away. She stopped with a new strength, and loosed his arm from about her. "No," she said, "I can but die. I will go back. He will think all this evil against me. He shall never have reason. Since I have lost you, my self-respect is the only thing left to me ; and would you, who say you love me, rob me of that ?"

He did not offer to take hold of her again. A streak of light was beginning to be visible in the east, and the objects in the garden began to be defined. "Oh !" she said, with a shudder, "it is growing daylight ; another moment and it would be too late for me to go back." And even

while she spoke she fled away, and entered the house. As she went she heard a great sob follow, and it wrung her heart. She hesitated one moment. "Is he worth this sacrifice," she said to herself, "of both our lives?" But even while she thought, a voice within her bade her go back. She entered the house. A tall figure intercepted her path. It was Wilson. "Oh, Miss Kizzy," she said, calling her by the old familiar name in a heart-broken kind of way, "I wouldn't have believed it of you, I wouldn't."

Keziah, in her old impetuous manner, flung her arms about Wilson, and cried upon her shoulder. "Do not judge me so harshly," she said. "You would not if you knew all."

Wilson was unrelenting though crying; she was angry with Keziah, and as yet had no comprehension of the case.

"I know appearances are against me, and I cannot make you believe in me. But I have done nothing so very wrong."

"Oh, don't make light of it, miss. It cannot be right, whichever way you put it."

"I know I ought not to have met him. I never shall meet him again."

"It's too late to mend matters now," said Wilson. "I'm not the only one as has seen you to-night, and has heard all."

"Do you mean my husband?" asked Keziah, faintly.

"No," said Wilson, bitterly. "You might know who it is—that Rimpler. And he will tell everything, and it will be just as bad."

"Oh, Wilson, there's no pity for me in your tone. Do I not deserve some pity?"

"You've been drove to it, I know. But that never counts for much. The only thing as counts is that you've done it. And, oh, that I should have lived to see this day!"

"Shall I go and tell my husband all about it before Mr. Rimpler can go to him?" said Keziah, in a tone that might be used in a forlorn hope.

Wilson hesitated. "No," at last she replied, "I think not, miss: His anger might be so that he wouldn't know what he did to you, if he heard it from you." And Keziah felt that a stronghold of her integrity had died; for she could not say to her husband, "He never tried to persuade me to leave you." Some women might have said it, even if untrue; but Keziah could not. She feared this must come out with the rest. She would not tell part of the truth, but the whole truth, if she must speak. And even if she did not speak, her husband would come to her, and she would have to answer him.

While they talked, the grey streak in the sky had grown larger.

Wilson started. She noticed she could see Keziah now—the outline of her figure. “The servants will be coming down,” she said; “go to your room. It is a wonder they are not down before, but I have been so staggered, I had not thought of it.” Keziah fled up the staircase like a creature afraid of the light, and Wilson went to Leonard, who was waking.

It was soon breakfast time. Keziah had dressed herself nicely, why, she could hardly have told, for she felt she was going to hear her sentence.

To her great surprise, on going to the breakfast-room, for it was not Keziah to absent herself, Mr. Rimpler was there before her, and appeared calm, as if nothing had happened. He had a black eye, and a plaster under it, which Keziah did not remember to have seen before, and which Mr. Rimpler blunderingly proceeded to apologise for, saying he had tumbled over something in his room in the dark; he did not attempt to say what.

Keziah felt he was telling her a lie, and instinctively the idea came into her mind that he had had a tussle with Wilson, and she smiled. Strange that human beings are so constituted that, in the moments when they are saddest and most sore pressed, the captive mind releases itself from bondage in spite of all control, and catches eagerly at an opportunity for mirth. So Keziah smiled in the depth of her trouble.

A few minutes later Mr. Hackbit came down. He was much as usual, rude and inattentive, and aggravating. But, beyond this, nothing occurred. Was the storm about to blow over, or was its breaking only deferred? Could Wilson have been mistaken about Rimpler’s having found her out? These questions puzzled Keziah extremely, and she could not help thinking about them in spite of herself.

After breakfast she noticed that Mr. Rimpler made no attempt to have private communication with her husband, and she remarked this to Wilson, and said that he might not know, or, if he did, he might not be going to tell.

“Have you ever seen a cat with a mouse, miss?” was the answer. “She lets it run about, and think itself free, because she can put her foot on it when she likes.”

“Well,” said Keziah, wearily. “Only if it is to come, I wish it would come quickly.”

CHAPTER XLIV.

JUBAL REVISITS JUMLEY.

THAT morning, when it was nearly dinner-time at the house of Rimmon, Jubal and his uncle David were coming across the Old Park from the station of Jumley.

"What a heathenish place this is!" Jubal remarked to his uncle, looking scornfully around at the wretched tumble-down buildings, the literally black road, and the great mounds of cinders, and ominous-looking holes. "Really, I had no idea it was half so bad as this."

"Ah, Jubal," said his uncle, "we never can judge a place till we've another to compare it with. When I was a little lad, and used to carry your grandfather's dinner in a basin tied up in a handkerchief, I should have been ready to slay anyone as had said Jumley wasn't the finest place in the world. No, not that," said David, blushing slightly. "I was always more like running away than slaying anybody. But these mines," he went on, pointing with his walking stick, "weren't worked out then, Jubal, that is, all of 'em weren't. And Joshua, your father, Dorcas, and I, and the dear baby that died, we used to play of a night, at hopscotch with a piece of coal, in this very place, and we used to run over the pit-banks until it got dark. And you see that house over there, Jubal?" he said, indicating the remains of one; "many's the time I've seen your grandfather washing what he called 'the first coat' off, outside that door. There was always a bench standing there, with a tub on it, ready for him. Your grandmother was a very clean woman, and she couldn't bear to have her place messed up, she said, as soon as it was cleaned."

"Well, uncle," rejoined Jubal, with a high colour in his cheeks, "I mean no offence; but for our future comfort, it may be as well that I should just say, that I am not particularly proud of having had a grandfather who worked in a coal-pit; nor am I particularly interested in detailed accounts of his methods of performing a toilet; nor of games played by my father and aunt Dorcas and you. And if I bring any fellows home with me, as you told me I may, I beg you will not mention this kind of thing. Of course, I mean no offence. But fellows are apt to look down on this sort of thing. I don't mean to say my grandfather might not have been a very good man."

"He was a very good man," said his uncle in a low tone. He was

taking in with difficulty what he was hearing, and he was wounded. Jubal went on—

“You see, however interesting these accounts may be to members of the family, they cannot be interesting to outsiders.”

“But you are not an outsider, Jubal,” replied his uncle, in the same grieved tone.

“Still, you see,” went on Jubal, “I never knew my grandfather, which is almost equal to not belonging to him. And,” he added, taking out a cigar, and lighting it, at the same time being very careful not to soil his straw-coloured glove, which fitted to a nicety, and was bordered by the whitest of white cuffs, “I can’t say that I know a single member of the family that anyone would like to belong to except you.” And Jubal glanced through his long lashes, at his uncle’s face, to see the effect of his little compliment. He saw only the troubled look. David Rimmon did not care much for compliments, and did not see them readily. But he did notice Jubal’s cigar, and said to him—

“Well, Jubal, if I were you, I wouldn’t go into your father’s house smoking, seeing he dislikes it so.”

“I would do a good deal to please you, uncle, but I shall not come here to palaver my father. They are not to kill the fatted calf on my behalf, and hail the prodigal returned. And that is the kind of story he’d tell to all the clerks in the bank, if I humoured his wishes ever so little. If he says I’m penitent, it shall be a direct lie ; he shan’t have a foundation of excuse for it. And see, uncle,” he said, pointing with the hand in which he held his lighted cigar for a moment, “as you are fond of reminiscences, there is the noble edifice occupied by grandmother during the latter part of her delightful sojourn in this neighbourhood.”

David, slow though he was, could take the impression of a tone as quickly as anyone ; and he felt that Jubal was making game of his grandmother ; and it cut him to the heart. Jubal had known her but as a querulous old woman, it was true ; but David had known her as the patient, hard-working mother of the family. He could remember many a time being rocked in her arms at the cottage-door, when he had fallen down, or when some playfellow had been hitting him. He did not put all this in words, but he said with a gentle dignity which became him greatly—

“You asked me, Jubal, not to speak about your grandfather, or our childhood. I now beg of you not to refer to your grandmother, whom you never knew—I repeat it, never knew ; for people are not themselves but someone else, when they are worn down by many griefs.”

"Oh, all right, uncle," said Jubal. "I didn't mean to hurt you. It's all true what you say. I was only joking either."

"That was just it," said David; "you were joking."

They were now passing a ruined engine-house; and Jubal, happening to glance down, saw lying half-hidden under a rusty wheel what appeared to be a bundle of parchment. He took it up, and deliberately put it into his pocket.

"What's that?" asked his uncle.

"A bit of old parchment somebody has thrown away."

"But you have never examined it. It might be some important document. I don't know how you are to know, if you don't examine it."

The fact is that Jubal did know what it was, and did not wish his uncle to know—that is, he knew to a certain extent. He had recognized his father's handwriting upon it; that was enough for him.

Yes; the knife had been to the grinder's, and had got sharpened; but it seemed to have dreams of cutting on its own account. Jubal, having a notion that his uncle was pondering over what he had picked up, and wishing to change his thoughts, remarked, "What an awful mess this road makes of one's boots and one's trousers!"

"You can turn your trousers up," replied his uncle, looking down at Jubal's. "I turned mine up in the station."

"But you see," return Jubal, in a lordly fashion, "trouser-bottoms never sit well when they've been turned up. It quite spoils the look."

This kind of talk was beyond David's comprehension. But just as he had always thought that Joshua knew better than he did, so now he thought that Jubal did, at least in most things. The stronger will has often this kind of effect on the weaker one. A strong wind is propelling a boat on a course which threatens disaster: surely the wind cannot be at fault. Why then trouble to alter the sails? The boat may be blown upon the rocks, and smashed to atoms, but what of that? One must submit to the will of Providence.

Jubal pulled his coat a little down, and smoothed a wrinkle. They were in the road where his father lived. In the houses they had to pass, people might be at the windows—people he had known, and who had known him when he was shabby, and used to go about with a stoop. Boys he used to play marbles with would probably see him. Well, if they did, they should see a gentleman, a fashionable man of the world, Jubal thought, who was not ruined by his father's disinheriting him, who was not coming home in sackcloth and ashes to denote his repentance,

but in as fashionable a suit as the best Manchester tailor could make for him, and with an air and manner befitting such clothes. It was no beggar coming to his father's house to ask bread. Jubal went as a prince conferring a favour by his presence.

The door was opened. Sarah, who had not seen Jubal so long, could hardly keep her joy in. She seized him after the manner of the Black Country people, not too gently. "And, oh, what a beautiful gentleman he's growed into," she exclaimed. "Bless his handsome face."

It was not until she had exhausted as many epithets as she could think of, that she began to notice that Jubal was not so effusive. In fact, he was considering whether she had been cooking, and might possibly grease his clothes. He said—

"Oh, so it's you, Sarah. How do you do?" This without a smile, and in a very condescending way; and he was about to pass her, when he turned back, and putting his hand in his pocket, took out half-a-crown. "Here, Sarah," he said, superiorly, "you lent me half-a-crown once; here it is. I just remembered it."

Sarah stared at him in blank amazement, but did not hold out her hand—the hard-working, rough hand that was always so kindly and so ready to labour to the uttermost in loving offices for those she cared for. Jubal dropped the half-crown into her hand, taking great care not to touch her with his glove.

The touch of the cold metal seemed to make Sarah realize the truth. She flung it from her, and flung her apron over her head, and began to sob, while she gasped out—

"No, I will never take it; no, not if I were starving. To think that I would ha' give all my savings for one shake of his hand."

Jubal flushed, and drew off one of his tight-fitting gloves. "Dear me," he said, "if it's a shake-hands you want, I don't object to shaking hands;" and he held out a hand white enough to have done a lady credit, but the girl would not take it. How many have had to suffer a like disappointment: how few are prepared for it beforehand. Our brother or our sister goes away from us for years, to come back again, so the world says. The body returns, perhaps, but the same self never. We have said good-bye to that person for ever. Yet those who stay at home think of the absent day and night during the long years, and break their hearts when but a ghost of the lost one comes home. Jubal merely did as the world does; only Sarah had never thought out the question. She knew that for years she had lightened his life when he was at home and

miserable, that she had during the past week prepared all kinds of pleasant surprises for him. And now he treated her like a stranger, and did not even shake hands with her. O simple Sarah! with your good heart, you have made and hidden away in the cupboard an apple-pasty for him; but his tastes have changed, he does not care for apple-pasty now. *Pâté de foie gras* is more in his line. You may as well leave the pasty in the cupboard where it is. But people in the Black Country don't cry quietly. They do nothing by halves. And Sarah's cry brought Miss Dorcas on the scene, resplendent in a green silk.

"Whatever's this disturbance about?" said that lady. But her eyes falling on her nephew, she was thunderstruck by his appearance. Could this handsome figure that might have come out of a gentleman's fashion-book be her nephew Jubal? It seemed impossible.

"How d'ye do, aunt?" said Jubal, extending the tips of his fingers.

"I think you are too fine for such a house as this," she remarked somewhat cuttingly. "We are not grand enough for such a fine gentleman."

"Ah," said Jubal, with a mock bow. (Sarah had slipped away into the kitchen.) "It is not to enjoy myself I have come, but to see the nakedness of the land. You see," he said, hoping his father was somewhere within hearing, "I've not let my Scripture knowledge rust. But really, aunt, you are behind the times down here at Jumley; green isn't in fashion, you know, now—not in Manchester."

This was a very spiteful thrust, and it went home. "You are very rude, indeed," rejoined Dorcas, feeling the glory die out of her green silk nevertheless. "I get the fashion-plates regularly. I know what's in fashion better than you. Well, David," she said, turning abruptly towards her brother; and a cool family kiss was exchanged.

But where was Mrs. Rimmon all this time? Will it be believed she was within hearing, and yet did not come to speak to her son? She was half-afraid. He did not seem to have received the others well; what would he think of her?

Jubal went into the dining-room, not seeing his mother in the dark passage leading into the kitchen. The table was laid for dinner. Jubal looked at everything on the table, while his uncle and his father shook hands. Mr. Rimmon was determined not to be the first to speak to his son, and Jubal decided that he could live without shaking hands with his father; so there was no sort of greeting between them. Jubal meant to speak to his father, if there were any occasion, as he would speak to any

stranger ; and an occasion came. Jubal sat down on one of the chairs, and got up again directly, looking scornfully at it.

"You don't mean to say that you've not had the spring of that chair mended yet?" he said to his father ; and that was all.

Dinner must come in, and Mrs. Rimmon knew she could delay no longer ; so she timidly entered the room, her face nervously working, and her tears ready to fall.

Jubal kissed her, and held her from him and looked at her, and kissed her again.

"The farce has begun, has it?" said Miss Dorcas, seeing this.

"No," said Jubal, standing with his arm round his mother's waist, "it has not. The farce will begin when the minister comes in to tea, and you and father act the loving family before him."

When Keziah entered the room, very pale, and looking paler in her black dress, which she wore for her grandmother, Jubal could hardly believe it was his sister. The short, crisp, black curls were the same as ever, but the features appeared to be changed ; they were more pointed—a change due to thinness.

She went first and kissed her uncle David. He pressed her hand encouragingly, and was much tenderer than ever in his manner towards her. Then Keziah went behind Jubal's chair, and, leaning over, kissed his forehead.

"Oh, Keziah," exclaimed Jubal, starting, "how frightfully cold your lips are !"

"Are they?" said Keziah, with a wan smile ; and she took her place at the table, kissing her mother as she passed her.

The door was now flung open, and Mr. Hackbit swaggered in, and surveyed the company with a leer. He gave a general nod, sat down and placed his napkin across his knees.

"Well, brother-in-law," said Jubal, across the table, "your valet has neglected you this morning. Do you know your toilet's rather, defective?"

Mr. Hackbit looked severely across at Jubal, and remarked with some asperity that he would rather wear no clothes at all than be dressed up like a doll, as Jubal was.

Dorcas was sitting next to him. "Your necktie's right under your ear," she said, "and you look as if you'd been to bed in your clothes."

"And you," retorted Hackbit, looking critically at his aunt and her

get-up, "you look as if you'd just come out from under a glass shade you do."

"Oh, don't let us have any quarrelling," put in David. "What can be the use of that?"

After dinner, Jubal announced his intention of taking a stroll. The mother would have liked to beg him to remain with her, but how could she dictate to this son who had grown into such a gentleman?

"Yes, show yourself to the inhabitants," was Hackbit's comment. "You'll collect a crowd if you go out."

"You'll collect a bigger crowd than I shall, some day," retorted Jubal. "And really, Hackbit," he said, eyeing his brother-in-law with a good deal of merriment in his face, "I want to light a cigar, and I believe I could do it at your nose. Have you been acting the clown, and forgotten to wash your face?" With this home-thrust he went out; and Keziah helped to clear the table.

Mr. Rimpler was to come in to tea. He had been invited to dinner, but had made an excuse. When tea-time came he appeared.

There was a marked coldness in Dorcas's manner of receiving Mr. Rimpler, which that gentleman could well account for. He, for his part, appeared to have some fine joke on hand, and laughed to himself without any evident reason several times in succession; and at each laugh Miss Dorcas coloured. He was, however, scrupulous in his attentions to her, and also seemed to take some interest in Jubal, whom he had been led to suppose a very different sort of person.

CHAPTER XLV.

MORE BITTER THAN SWEET.

WHEN at last the evening was over, and it was time to go home, Mr. Rimpler offered to escort Miss Dorcas, which seemed natural enough; but no sooner had he made the proposal than Dorcas said, spitefully, "No, thank you, Mr. Rimpler, I am no chicken, and am not at all afraid of being in the Old Park myself at night." In spite of this, Rimpler did go with her; and they walked along in silence for a considerable distance.

At last Miss Dorcas said, snappishly, "Are you going to speak, or not, Silas?"

Mr. Rimpler gave a snort, and said in a tone of some bitterness, "I don't remember the occasion on which I asked you to call me Silas. When I begin to call you Dorcas, you'll have some excuse."

The unquenchable spirit of the spinster rose. "And if I did call you Silas, how many aliens and outcasts would be glad to have somebody to take them by the hand and call them by their Christian name."

"But I happen to be neither an alien nor an outcast. I tell you once for all, you must drop it."

"Oh, Silas,——"

Mr. Rimpler stopped in the pathway. "If you don't drop it, I won't go another inch with you ; so now you know. And another thing I should like to refer to is your manner of making signs at me before people."

"And you never take any notice when I do," interrupted Miss Dorcas, "no matter how important it may be."

"And I never will notice. I tell you once for all, I won't have it. Do you think I want all the world to believe we have a secret understanding together? It was disgusting all the evening to see your eye fixed on me every time I looked your way."

"And this after the way you left me in the Old Park last night!" said Dorcas, growing irate in her turn. They were on the same ground now.

"I'll leave you here again if you don't mind."

"Then you'll leave all that I have to communicate to you."

"I don't care a d—— about your communications."

"You know you do, or you wouldn't have taken so much trouble about it all. Well, at any rate, I got the papers you asked me to get out of Joshua's safe."

"Where are they?" responded Silas, now interested in a moment, and betrayed into showing it. He had not expected this.

"Well, I waited here, till I was cold and tired, last night, and I lost them ; so there."

"You lost them," said Rimpler, horror-struck.

"Yes, and I had them safe enough, when you came first ; and you'd have had them if it hadn't been for your going off with that foreigner. I heard you deny me to him, and laugh when he said that I was no chicken. Men are bad enough for anything."

But Silas had not been listening to her last words. He was absorbed by the thought that the papers were lost. At last he drew a long breath,

as if he had forgotten to breathe a few moments, and was making up for it.

"Well," he said, "what a fool I have been."

Dorcas was infinitely relieved to find it was not herself he was calling a fool. "I might know that a woman was sure to make an ass of herself in business," he added. This somewhat spoiled the soothing effect of the last sentence he had uttered.

They had now come to a standstill, both of them.

"Now, I have a warning to give you," said Silas. "It is for your own good, not mine. You must be as silent as the grave upon this business. Do not think of telling anything to spite me, ever ; it would be no good. You've no proof of any kind against me, remember ; and the moment I hear of your doing anything, then I shall begin. And if I ever should, you will wish you had never been born, mind that. And from to-night I've done with you ; so don't get trying to see me or to speak to me. And now that we are parting, I'll say another thing to you, that I've been thinking all along ; and that is this. There's no wickedness you'd stop short at, to get your own ends. You don't mind whom you betray. But you can't think for the future that you've done it all in the dark. I've seen my share of bad women ; but I never came across a worse than you, in reality."

Dorcas was literally thunderstruck. She could make no reply. She could not believe she was hearing right. "And is this true, all that you are saying ?" she said at length.

"Yes, it is true," replied Rimpler.

"Then," said she, with a tragic air, "I shall throw myself down one of these old mines."

"Don't," said Rimpler, quietly. "It would be quite lost upon me. I should not try to get you out ; and I should not go in mourning for you." And Miss Dorcas did not fulfil her threat.

"And am I really to say good-bye to you, Silas ?" said Dorcas plaintively. "Am I never to hear the sound of your voice again, the voice that has grown so dear to me ?"

"You'll hear my voice soon enough, if you interfere with my business. And really I don't think I ever did meet with such a humbug in my whole life. But I tell you, I can see through it ; don't try it on with me."

"Then I will go home to my desolate hearth," said Miss Dorcas, still in a tragical vein.

"Yes, do," said Rimpler. "You'd make any hearth desolate ; and you'd turn any paradise into a howling wilderness."

"Very well," returned Dorcas, "I will leave you ; and the day may come when I can do you a bad turn, and I shall do it, never you fear."

"I don't fear," was Rimpler's reply, "but I knew it before you told me."

Yet Dorcas did not move off.

"Look here," said Rimpler ; "if you think by waiting you'll get me to alter my mind, you're mistaken. I shall go not a step farther with you, and you can go home yourself."

Dorcas moved away with great bitterness in her heart. But when she was out of sight, Silas lit match after match, and searched—quite fruitlessly as we know he must—for the missing papers. He scarcely expected to find anything in his search ; but he was very angry, and it suited his humour to be searching.

He was not alone, though he imagined himself to be so. Jubal had strolled after Rimpler and his aunt, on pretence of smoking, but in reality hoping to hear what terms they were on, and to find out anything detrimental to either of them. He heard the quarrel, which amused and gratified him. He also felt sure what the subject was. But if he had not been sure, his suspicion would have been confirmed by the search Mr. Rimpler made under his eyes.

Jubal did not wait to see how this search ended. He preferred to get away while still unobserved. When he got home—that is, to his father's house—he found his mother in a violent state of agitation.

"What is the matter, mother ?" he asked.

"Oh, Jubal, somebody has robbed your father."

"Do you mean broken into the bank, mother ?"

"No, the safe, here, in the house. He's nearly frantic."

"Was it money ?"

"No ; papers."

"Well, they can't matter much, unless they're bank notes," said Jubal.

Jubal swaggered into the room where his father was.

"What is it you've lost ?" he said in an indifferent tone.

"Papers," cried Mr. Rimmon, quite forgetful for the moment that he and his son were enemies.

"I suppose they're not of much consequence," said Jubal.

"They are of all consequence," cried his father. "I tell you unless :

can gain possession of those papers I'm ruined—ruined—do you hear, Jubal?—ruined."

"They must be funny kinds of papers, I should think," said Jubal.

"Jubal," said David, who was as white as his brother, "is this a time to talk like that?"

"When were they stolen?" Jubal asked his father. "To-day?"

"Oh, no; I've had the key in my possession all day."

"Lock picked, I suppose, then."

"No, the lock has not been picked," said the father, despairingly.

"Then how do you account for it?"

"Yesterday I dropped my key accidentally; it must have been used by some one."

"Well," said Jubal, with mock sympathy, "it isn't a pleasant thing to have lost papers that compromise you. You may never find out where they are; and it's like a sword hanging over your head by a hair, isn't it, father?"

Every word stabbed Mr. Rimmon. Who knew their weight so well as he did? "Oh," he said, turning to his brother, with a touch of very real feeling, "how I wish I'd stuck to my bank, David, and kept everything square."

"I wish thee hadst," replied David, falling into his dialect in his emotion.

"Jubal," went on his father, with such a real ring in his tone that Jubal was startled, "I've not trained you well, heaven knows."

"Earth knows it, too," put in Jubal.

The father took no notice, but went on in a most solemn tone. "But you are young, and need never come to be what I am. You've often heard me quote Scripture, Jubal."

"Too often," said Jubal.

"Well, you shall hear some more, Jubal, though it may be the last, and it's the truest in all the Bible. 'The way of transgressors is hard.'"

David was quite overcome, and hid his face in his hands; Jubal felt no kindling of sympathy.

"Don't take any notice of him, uncle," he said contemptuously; "he's only making out."

"Making out!" cried the elder man, in an agonised tone. "That is likely, that is! I meant to set it all right, and to give up the other business." It was the first time the "other business" had ever been alluded to

between the brothers. "And now I've no chance. Oh, I wish all my money was sunk in a mine."

Half-an-hour later, when Joshua was alone, he bitterly regretted having exposed himself in this manner ; and he would have regretted it still more had he known that the son before whom he had committed himself had the missing papers at that very moment in his possession, and gloried in it. Joshua had been a hard tyrant to Jubal when Jubal was a boy, and now that Jubal was independent of him, he showed no disposition to heap coals of fire on his father's head by returning good for evil. Had this view of the case been put to Jubal, he would probably have said, so great was his hatred to his father, that he would have preferred to heap coals of fire under his father's feet and burn him to ashes. The slave makes a terrible slave-driver, when his chance comes. His master may have known limits ; he knows none.

So while Joshua tossed that night upon his pillow, in an agony, for the time being, of remorse and despair, his son lay awake, too, for very joy. He had got his father in his power.

CHAPTER XLVI.

DEATH BEFORE DISHONOUR.

THE snow had been falling all the evening ; sometimes slightly, sometimes more thickly. It was falling when the different companies went home from the house of Rimmon. When Thomas Hackbit and Keziah had got outside the house, he said to her—

"You are a very fair actress, Keziah ; but I can beat you in acting."

Keziah turned her face towards him instinctively, though she could not see him, not to miss what he should say next.

"You have kept your eyes open very well, considering you were up all last night. But don't you think I have, considering that I was up, too? Should you like to know where I was last night, Keziah?"

"No," she replied, in a stifled manner.

"But I shall tell you, whether you wish to hear or not. I passed the night in my own garden, Keziah."

Keziah could not bear to have it broken to her thus. She would do it herself and have it over the more quickly. The quiet tone in which he was speaking filled her with infinite dread. Of course, he knew every thing. Well, there was no help for it.

"You may as well say it at once ; you saw us, and you heard everything."

"Yes," he echoed, "I saw you, and I heard everything."

"Then, Thomas," she said, putting both of her hands on his arm, and forcing him to stop, "you heard me refuse to go. That is better than anything I could have told you, if you heard it."

This seemed to lighten her load for the moment. At least he had not to take her word for it ; he had heard her himself.

"I know," she went on with great fervour, "how wrong I have been, I know it myself, if you do not say it ; but I at least stopped short, and ——" She continued, beginning to cry bitterly, "I was so miserable."

Keziah had made a mistake in using this last expression. Hackbit had been in love with her in a certain way, perhaps was so still ; and it does not smooth a man's temper for his wife to tell him, by way of excuse, that she has been led into seeking the company of another man because he, forsooth, has made her miserable. It was therefore with additional bitterness that he next spoke to her.

"Don't try that on with me, Keziah," he said, shaking her off. "Nothing you can say will alter my decision."

Then he had arrived at some decision, Keziah thought, her heart failing her. She did not attempt to imagine what it could be ; she knew it must be the worst for her, whatever it was.

"It is not last night alone that you have met that man, Keziah. I know all about it ; and I've determined that, come what may in consequence—mark my words, come what may—you shall never enter my house again."

The full sense of the words could hardly strike Keziah in a moment. Could he mean that she was to have no shelter that night—that she was to be shut out of house and home, like some vile creature who deserved no better ?

As she made no reply, he asked her, "Do you understand ?"

They had walked on, and were now standing before their own house.

"You cannot mean it," she said, huskily.

"I do mean it," he said. "Try to enter, and I will throw you back with my own hand."

"But you won't separate me from my baby ?" she said, with a sob in her voice.

"You care for the baby !" he said, with a hoarse laugh.

Keziah clung to him. "I do, I do," she cried. "Let me have him, and I will go away without a word."

"And let him starve with you!" sneered Hackbit. "But no, you are not going to starve," he added; "you will know where to go."

She would not notice this. "He shall not starve: I would not let him starve."

"And so you think I would let him eat that man's bread?" said Hackbit, sarcastically.

"Oh, I can't make you believe me, if you won't," said Keziah; "it would not be that man's bread; but he should not starve."

"And in any case," went on Hackbit, "do you think I should let my child starve?"

"But you would let me starve."

"You are different, and you know where to go."

"I'm his mother," pleaded Keziah faintly.

"We've talked enough," was the reply. "Away with you;" and he pushed some money into her hand, a few coins. She flung them from her, and the snow covered them. In a flash, it seemed, he was gone, and the door was shut, and she heard it barred. Excited to frenzy, she felt like ringing the bell violently, and rebelling against this sudden expulsion; and she stood and gazed, she could not have told how long, at the house.

At last she was conscious of some one approaching her: it was Silas Rimpler. She moved away, and he did not see her. She heard him ring the bell. She heard the door unbolted. It was opened, and a flood of light shot across the snow-covered path.

Should she make a sudden bound, and be within that light and warmth, and beg him on her knees to let her remain with her baby?

No, it could be of no use; nothing could be of any use now.

The door was shut, and again she heard the bolts.

Still she waited, till at last lights shone out from the windows of her husband's and Mr. Rimpler's bedrooms.

Then these lights went out, and all was dark. The snow began to fall faster. Keziah felt she must do something for herself now.

But the only thing that suggested itself was to go round to the back of the house, through the garden gate, and look for the night-nursery light. That was out too.

"They believe I am staying at mother's for the night," she thought.

"They little know I am shivering out here,"

What a grim satire it seemed. She was standing on the spot where, last night, she had listened, with so much hidden longing in her heart, to an appeal to leave the place. To-night she could not enter again if she would. She passed out at the garden gate again. She could not stay there, it was clear. Go to her father's she would not. No, she must walk on, as far away as she could, before morning. She would write to her mother.

But the roads were bad, and walking was difficult. When once outside the gate, she had turned and thrown some kisses towards the window where the little Leonard was asleep. "At least he will not ill-treat the child," she thought ; and that was something.

She had got a little housekeeping money in her pocket. She could go on a few days till she should get something to do. She trudged patiently along the road, which grew darker. She knew where she was going, and kept her direction ; it was to Wolverhampton. She knew of a woman there who kept a registry office for servants. She had got servants for her. She would go to her, and get a temporary lodging while she could plan what to do. The woman had always seemed kind and pleasant ; and this was the only person Keziah could think of that she would be willing to go to.

It was a long, weary walk, and Keziah had not made much headway when she was conscious of being followed. She stopped a moment and listened.

No one was following her. Yet as soon as she began to walk again, she heard the footsteps after her.

Some furnaces were lighting up the way ahead of her, now. She must pass the glow ; so must the one who was following her. It is a horrible feeling, that of being followed in the darkness, and only those who have experienced it can know how horrible. Along a Black Country road this is especially true. There is a grimness about the road, the boundaries of which are so often black mounds, or dark, stagnant waters. To be followed on such a road is worse than to be followed on a decent high road with inoffensive hedges on either side. Keziah felt this to the full, in her excited condition. It was one horror more added to the rest. Besides, it is almost a necessity for a Black Country person born and bred to have some trace of superstition, so called ; and it did alarm Keziah all the more that the footsteps ceased when she listened to them. She walked on bravely, and was getting nearer and nearer to the light of the foundries. But then the clanging of the iron made it almost impossible for her to

hear the footsteps. She clung to the hope that she should see who it was when they both passed the light of the foundry.

And now she herself was in the full glare, and her ears were deafened by the noise. A thought struck her. "Perhaps the thing that is following me may wait till I am out of sight before passing ;" and she, who had often traversed the road before, knew by experience that there were miles of dark, deserted road beyond this one light.

Opposite the foundry was a tumble-down cottage, one of many such, deserted and left to ruin when those who had occupied them had migrated. She would hide herself a moment in this place, and perhaps the thing that was following her would pass before her eyes.

Once inside the cottage, she placed herself in the shadow near where a window had been, but where now not even a frame existed. She could see the road, and she could see the foundry. She moved a little farther, for no particular reason, and something sprang upon her with an uncathly sound. All sensation stopped within her for the moment, and then her heart gave a great thump that nearly shook her. She saw what had startled her, for it was crossing the road now in the light. It was only a homeless cat that had sought shelter from the inclement weather. Still, the fright had increased her nervousness greatly. She tried to keep her attention on the dark road, with a streak of light across it. But somehow her gaze was fascinated by the foundry, where the night-workers moved hither and thither in a terrible glow of light, being covered at times by masses of sparks, and then dragging out from between immense rollers long lengths of red-hot iron, and carrying them quickly, and without any apparent discretion, right among the crowd of other workers, and laying them at the side of others to cool upon the ground. These silent workers, for they were not talking to each other—how could they, for that matter, amidst the hubbub of hammers, the hissing of streams of water upon red-hot iron, and the roaring of the forges? They seemed to Keziah's excited mind almost like demons preparing for some evil deed.

But now as she looked, something obstructed the view. It was the figure of a man along the road. His face was turned towards the forge, and he seemed puzzled, and stood hesitating. At last, he walked across a black mound that separated the forge from the road, and went towards the great shed under which the men were working. He seemed to be speaking. One man came out of the glare, and he held his ear towards him, and then shook his head and went back.

Keziah felt she must move on now, or be detected. For how did she know that the stranger, whom she believed to be the person who had followed her, might not look next into the ruined cottage? But no, she could not move away. He was crossing the road, in the direct stream of light, and as his back was in the full light, his face was in shadow. She put her hand against some of the brickwork to steady herself, and it came down with a crash. The stranger paused, and then made his way to the cottage.

One of the bricks had fallen heavily upon her foot. It was extremely painful. Everything seemed to be closing in. The figure entered by the doorway, and came quite near to her; and then, in what seemed to her an unearthly tone, spoke her name.

If she did not cry out, that did not proceed from any great bravery on her part; it was from inability. Who has not in a thunderstorm waited with bated breath for the next clap and flash? and if on a lonely stretch of moor, who has not trembled inwardly in such a storm, as crash has succeeded crash, and glare, utter darkness? Keziah's life of the last few hours was such a storm as this; and at this moment her breath was bated for another crash, with possible direful consequences. Someone had said, "Keziah," but the voice was one she did not know.

In what appeared ages afterwards, a hand travelled towards her, and touched her. Then the same strange voice said, "Don't you know me? I have come to take care of you."

Then the bolt had not descended upon her and struck her. This was her thought at first. But on its heels came another thought. The bolt had descended, and had struck her. She knew who was speaking to her.

"How dare you follow me?" she said. "How can you have the cowardice! And only last night you promised me you would never see me again. You have lied to me; you have lied to me!" she said bitterly, the tears chasing each other rapidly down her cheeks in the darkness.

A groan was the only reply to this.

"Why, do you want me to hate you too?" she cried. "If you loved me, you would care for my reputation."

"Oh, Keziah," cried her companion in heart-broken tones, "to think you should ever use such words to me! You have misunderstood me, quite misunderstood me."

"I have understood you perfectly," returned Keziah. "It is you who have not understood me." And she tried to limp away. But the pain in her foot was so great, she was obliged to stop herself.

"Keziah, why won't you believe me? I said I had come to take care of you, as your father might, or your brother; that is my meaning."

"Yes," she cried passionately, "like my father and my brother! you have well spoken. My father and my brother would ruin me for their own ends; so would you, or you would never have asked me to leave my husband's roof last night, and so get me turned out to-night. Yet I was going away, praying for you, and forgiving you. But now you have broken your word and followed me, to take advantage of my misery, what can I say to you? If ever there was a moment when you should have kept yourself far from me, it is now."

"Keziah, I would die for you."

"Then why not do a small thing, and keep away from me?"

"Keziah, that is a greater thing."

"Then be a man and do the greater thing. I have done wrong, too," she said, weeping afresh, "or it might never have come to this."

"No, it was all my fault," said Rupert, gazing with despairing tenderness at her.

"I deserve what has come," said Keziah.

"Heaven knows, that is not true," replied Rupert. "It is I, and only I, who have been to blame. Keziah, tell me what to do, and you shall see how I will obey you now."

"Go back at once to Leamington, if you mean what you say; and show the world that I am not with you. That will be proving your love for me."

"I will do it," he answered with a sob. "But you will tell me where you are going? At least you will tell me that?"

"No," said Keziah sadly; "it is right you should not know that either."

"What harm could it be for you to tell me where you are?"

"There would be harm."

"You have some money with you?"

"Yes, I have some money."

"And will you take just a little from me? You may return it some day, if you like."

"Do you not understand," broke out Keziah hotly, "that I can have no dealings with you of any kind? Go back at once; you may even now have been seen following me."

He took off a large scarf that was about his neck. "Let me give you this, Keziah. You are but ill clad."

"How can you!" she cried despairingly. "Why do you make my way so difficult? Would you have me found in possession of your scarf? Where is your common sense?"

"Oh, God!" cried Rupert, breaking down utterly, and sobbing. "And am I, who love you so, not to be allowed to do the least thing for you, because a cursed villain has robbed you from me, and ill-treated, you, and shut his door upon you?"

"It can do no good to talk of that now," said Keziah. She was about to pass him. He caught her by the arm, still shaken with sobs, and would not let her pass. She tried to wrench herself free.

"Keziah, I have only one thing to ask you. I know more about the world than you do, Keziah. If you do not want to be suspected, Keziah, go to some friend. You need not tell me whom. If you promise me this one thing, I shall go away contented. Contented! No, not that. But it will be more endurable, that is all I can say."

"I will promise you that, then," said Keziah. And she was moving away again.

"Not one word of farewell, Keziah?" he said.

"Good-bye," she answered, passing on.

He had almost hoped, when he had so far acceded to her wish, that she would have given a different farewell from this cold "good-bye." But her manner was such that he dared not ask for more. The Keziah he loved could never be further from him, he felt, than she was this night.

She was outside now: but these words followed her in a choked whisper, "You will say you forgive me."

"I forgive you," she said in a low voice; and disappeared in the darkness.

And Elworthy, half beside himself with grief and misgiving, and unable to do anything, watched the spot where her figure had disappeared, until his eyes were strained; but follow her he would not—rather, could not. And when at last he had gazed so long that his eyes, grown weary, drooped their lids, he slowly turned his head and gazed at the foundry.

"No man has ever been so wretched as I am," he thought within himself, "so wretched and so powerless." And while he thought this, the immense hammers came down upon the iron, and flattened it and crushed

it. "Oh!" he thought, "if only I could place my head one moment under that hammer, and end it all; it would be so soon over." He remained long gazing at the glare, and scarcely thinking. All was too much in a tumult within him. At last he became conscious that he must go away. If he were not in Leamington in the morning, people might say he had been with Keziah. They should never say that; and he staggered out of the place, and walked like a drunken man along the road.

It had ceased snowing some time, and the path was very dark. Snow blackens almost as it falls in the Black Country; and it must be deep indeed before it can be like a pure white sheet over the earth. It was not deep now, and was blackened as it had fallen.

At last he struck his foot against something: it was only a rising footpath, of which there are many in these neighbourhoods, a foot, and even sometimes a yard, above the road. He staggered along this footpath. It seemed to be going down all at once. He felt himself falling and his next sensation was that water was closing over his head.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE GREATER BARN.

And he said, . . . "I will pull down my barns, and build greater."

HAD Keziah waited before her own house a little longer, she would have seen the lights reappear in the two front bedroom windows; for Mr. Hackbit, having made an effort to go to bed as if nothing were the matter, had found himself quite too excited to sleep. "D—— it," he said to himself, "I'll have that fool Rimpler up, and wet our throats a bit."

Now Mr. Hackbit was deeper than Rimpler gave him credit for being: though he did let things out sometimes when he was drunk, they never were things that told against himself. To-night he had driven Keziah forth, and so natural had been his demeanour that no one suspected it. The servants knew she had not come home, but they thought she must be staying at her mother's, and of course they knew better than to ask Mr. Hackbit a question.

Mr. Rimpler, finding Hackbit at home on his return, imagined

Keziah to be in the house. He had likewise imagined Hackbit to be ignorant of what had occurred the night before. So when Hackbit rapped sharply at his door, and then thrust his head in, and said, "Get up, Rimpler, I say ; let's have a drink," he merely thought Hackbit had passed an unpleasant day, and meant to make up for it ; and got up directly, very quickly as Hackbit thought, for he did not know Mr. Rimpler was sitting dressed by the window.

When Mr. Rimpler had fumbled about the room a little, he lit his candle, completed his toilet as if it had been morning, and went downstairs. He looked in the dining-room, but found no Mr. Hackbit. He was surprised. He went into the hall and listened ; he heard a movement in the kitchen, and went there.

"I say, what are you doing?" he asked Hackbit, who was prowling about with a candle.

"I am going to get some wood to light a fire in the drawing-room ;" adding, with great assumption of grandeur, "We'll sit in the drawing-room, Rimpler. I'm a rich man, and shall be richer. Why shouldn't I use the best room I've got?"

"All right," replied Rimpler, amused, "that's your look-out, you know. Only I shouldn't have thought you were such a fool as to tell anyone you are rich."

"You are not the outside world."

"No ; and you're shrewd enough to know I should guess in any case. That's it, isn't it, Hackbit?"

A large fire was soon burning in the drawing-room, what with the unusual quantity of wood and the bellows which Mr. Rimpler plied. Hackbit sat down complacently, with two or three bottles in front of him, also glasses and sugar.

"I say, Rimpler, how should you like to be a partner?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Rimpler, indifferently.

"But I say, Rimpler, by Jove, we are making money, old Rimmon and I. You think you know everything, but we could surprise you a bit. Some people save and save and save, and never enjoy their money. I don't mean to be like that." And he poured out a glass of neat brandy, and took a draught without blinking. "What if my father was a collier, I mean to have a place among county gentlemen, — them. Rokesworth Hall is to let, and I mean to take it. I'm getting richer than them all, and, hang it, why shouldn't I live as well? Ah, Rimpler, though they hate me, they shall envy me. If old Josh Rimmon is content to live in

that pig-sty, all the better for me. I'll live for the two of us." He took another draught of brandy. "And — me, Rimpler," he went on, "there's some pleasure in living when you can buy a horse, or what not, that some noble lord would give his head for, just because you've the longest purse. By Jove, I'd give any price, if I thought one of them chaps wanted it."

All this did not arouse the interest and sympathy in Mr. Rimpler which it might have done, had he not known about the missing papers. The man who knows that the best horse in a race has been drugged and will break down does not show extraordinary acuteness in not betting on him ; so Silas Rimpler did not show astounding acuteness in not backing the House of Rimmon ; and throughout Mr. Rimpler's life he had nearly always backed the winner. He rather enjoyed the joke of hearing Hackbit run on, however, and encouraged him to talk.

"Bills of sale are the grandest investments," said Hackbit, "while it can be kept dark ; and my experience is," he went on in a cunning tone, "that people who have been sold up have not spirit enough left to go to law with you about it, neither have they the cash," and he burst into a laugh.

"Do you know, in the beginning, Rimmon wanted to pay me a salary? I soon taught him a lesson. I've had more than he's had, by Jove. There's a day for every dog, and let every dog have his day."

"Yes," Mr. Rimpler assented, "let every dog have his day. My day'll come next." And he pretended to sip his brandy.

"Don't count your chickens before they're hatched," replied Hackbit, who was now getting much the worse for drink.

"I don't usually," retorted Mr. Rimpler. "Neither do I get drunk, and so see double when I'm about counting them, after they're hatched."

This was a little too refined for Hackbit in his present condition, so he took offence.

"Confound you, do you mean to say I'm drunk?"

"Certainly not. Why, you've only had half-a-bottle."

It was not long before he had the whole bottle, and his appearance began to alarm Rimpler not a little. He sullenly hung his head down, and looked lowering. At last he intently fixed his eyes on the door of the room. Rimpler involuntary gazed in the same direction. He could see nothing. "What is it?" he said to Hackbit.

Hackbit pointed a trembling hand towards the door. The hand had

grown very bony since he had taken to drinking so furiously, for he had eaten hardly enough to keep body and soul together.

"What is it?" inquired Rimpler again.

"Don't you see those spiders?"

"I can't say that I do."

"Then you must be drunk, or mad. Look, Rimpler," he said, rising in agitation and trembling all over, "have you ever seen such large spiders? You can't pretend you don't see them. Look, they are chasing each other in two lines; and they'll come down; they are coming down. They're coming at me, and they're growing bigger."

Rimpler became more and more alarmed. Hackbit clutched at the tablecloth, and tried to get on to the table; but he could not; and the tablecloth came off, and the bottles crashed on to the floor.

"Oh," he cried, shaking till the very floor shook, "the cloth's full of them too. See how they spread their legs and come out. Oh, let me get out of here," he screamed frantically. "The walls are covered with them. Are you a devil that you won't help me?"

And with one more effort to escape from the room, he fell face downwards upon the ground.

We will spare our readers the horrors of the scene which followed. Joshua and David Rimmon both came, at Rimpler's request; and by the doctor's suggestion, Mr. Saltring was telegraphed for. He arrived about eleven o'clock in the morning, and with him Dr. Towers. He had brought this doctor on his own responsibility, having such great faith in him; and he took him upstairs without any ceremony.

Mr. Rimmon was seated in a chair, looking the picture of misery; Hackbit was sleeping now, and breathing very heavily. Dr. Towers advanced to the bedside and lifted his eyelid, and turned and looked about the room, but said nothing.

"He'll get better now," said Mr. Rimmon, hoarsely; "he's gone to sleep. Oh, what a night we've had."

"He'll never wake again," replied Dr. Towers, quietly. "I have seen cases like this before. It is a possible ending to *delirium tremens*. They sleep to death. I can do nothing for him; so I had better get back."

"Wait a bit," said Mr. Saltring. "I want you to witness something." He was ashy white. He walked towards the bed. He laid one hand upon the man who was sleeping his last sleep, and raised the other above his head, and looked upwards.

"I call God to witness," he said, "that I will never sell one drop of any intoxicating liquor again. And I will rid myself of any property I now possess that is the result of the sale of drink."

His raised hand fell by his side, and he faced round and looked at the astonished Joshua and Towers.

"There is no evil so great in the wide world as drink. Can it matter whether the poor wretch drinks it at your counter or carries his bottle home? The end is the same."

He looked upwards again.

"I pray the God of pity to forgive me for the great wrong I have done the human race, for ever having sold or even given away a drop of this poison of souls. Reparation there can be none. The evil is done." And Mr. Saltring covered his face with his hands.

Dr. Towers placed his arm round Mr. Saltring's neck, and said soothingly, "My good friend, God judges us by the motives. Could you, who have the best heart in the world, have ever meant to ruin any one?"

"Remember the proverb, doctor," returned Mr. Saltring, without taking his hands from his face. "'Evil is wrought by want of thought as well as want of heart.' This has brought it home to me, brought it home to me. Within the last twelve months," he said, raising his white face and looking at the doctor, "cases of spirits have left my shop enough to bring this"—and he indicated with his hand without looking towards the bed—"to I fear to say how many homes. Come, doctor, let us go away. I should like to have seen Keziah, but I can't face her. If no one had sold the brandy, he couldn't have bought it, and he couldn't have drunk it."

"He didn't buy the brandy of you, at any rate," said Joshua Rimmon, rousing himself to speak.

"That makes no difference," replied Mr. Saltring. "Come, doctor let us go."

But while he spoke, all three noticed that the sound from the bed had ceased. Towers looked a moment, and answered Mr. Rimmon's look, "He's gone, poor fellow," he said.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

TOM TOWERS GOES UP FOR HIS LAST EXAMINATION.

IT was about the middle of January. Thomas Hackbit lay in Jumley cemetery ; and in the windows of his house was a notice, "To Let." No one had made any search for Keziah. She was missing, and Elworthy was missing. The facts seemed to explain themselves. The house of Rimmon was disgraced.

Mr. Rimpler had been engaged by Mr. Rimmon, and was now residing in his house. The baby was there, too ; and Wilson had come to nurse him, at Mr. Rimmon's request. The other servants had been dismissed. Mr. Hackbit had left no will, as is often the case with those whose business it is to make wills.

During the last few weeks Mrs. Rimmon had aged visibly, and seemed so near breaking up that her infirm state formed a principal reason for Mr. Rimmon's engaging Wilson. Mr. Rimmon's hair had grown very grey, and he walked with a slower step, with his head bent forward, and his shoulders stooping.

But where was Keziah ?

It was growing dark one evening when a ghost of her former self—yes, a ghost even of her changed self—entered the gate of The Hollies at Bowdon. Maud had been watching at the window and saw her approach, and flew to open the door. Keziah fell into her arms, crying hysterically, "I have come, Maud, like a beggar, to beg shelter. I have no pride left now, Maud."

Maud half carried, half led her into her favourite sitting-room, cooing over her and calling her her lost darling, her own darling, and her own Kizzy. In an incredibly short time refreshment was brought, and the poor wanderer was fed and warmed. Maud, flitting hither and thither, swift as in the old days, carried most of the things with her own hands, and only tended, and forbore to question her old friend.

When Keziah had eaten, and was warm, her head drooped upon her breast, and she fell asleep. Maud looked at the head. Where were all the short curls gone ? The hair was shorn quite close to her head. And her cheeks, how sunken they were ! Maud had placed herself so that the head might rest against her, and caressed it tenderly with her white fingers, and dropped scalding tears upon it, and remained cramped in one position for nearly two hours, rather than wake her darling. Then

Keziah opened her large startled eyes, and said pleadingly and quickly—"Look, I will tell you something. Don't send me out just yet. I have nowhere to go to." Then she recollected herself, and said, "Oh, I was dreaming. I thought I was back in the hospital again. Oh, Maud," she cried, flinging her arms about her friends neck, "how glad I am it is true I am here."

Maud answered only by her caresses.

Then Keziah drew her head back, and looked into her friend's eyes inquiringly. "Do you know?" she asked. "Have you heard?"

"Dearest Kizzy," replied Maud, "if I have heard, and if I know, I do not reproach you?"

"Reproach me?" said Keziah, looking puzzled. "Well, yes, I did provoke him; but I am repentant now, Maud; I will go back to him and beg his forgiveness."

Was it possible that Keziah did not know that her husband was dead? It seemed so. She had been in a hospital, it appeared from her conversation. She might know nothing.

"Kizzy," she said, taking the wan face between her hands—the face that had nothing to recommend it now but its pathos—"Kizzy, you will never go back to your husband."

Keziah started, not at the words she had heard, but at the tone. She looked for more, and did not speak.

"Kizzy, my own love, you are free; your husband is dead."

Keziah flung herself upon the couch, and sobbed hysterically. "Oh, that I had been a better wife to him," she cried. "Oh, that I had been a better wife to him. It might never have ended so." And she sobbed aloud.

Maud knelt by Keziah, and laid her head beside hers, and wept with her. She was weeping because she believed her friend had fallen.

"Kizzy," she said in her ear, "at least if you did go away with him, you have left him now."

Keziah started up at the words, and looked her friend in the face. "I—go away with him, Maud! Who dares to say it?"

Maud only cried, "Thank God! it is not true."

"True, Maud!" said Keziah. "No: I have sunk low, but not so low as that."

"Oh, Kizzy, forgive me for having believed it," said Maud, humbly. "But you see it looked so much like it, that you and he should both disappear."

"He disappear!" exclaimed Keziah, affrightedly. "Is he not in Leamington then?"

"No, he has never been heard of since that night. Your brother Jubal came in here and told me all about it."

Keziah looked very quietly into the fire. And then, as if suddenly recollecting, said, "Where is your husband, Maud?"

"He is in London, Kizzy, being examined. We will not talk of him, if you don't mind. And now, Kizzy, had not you better go to bed? I don't think you should talk any more to-night."

"But I must know one thing more. Of course, my baby has gone to father's?"

"Yes, and Wilson is there with it."

A beautiful smile broke over Keziah's face, as she heard this, and she said contentedly, "Then I think I will go to bed, Maud."

It must have been about three o'clock in the morning, when both Maud and Keziah awoke with a start. They heard a fall and a terrible crash.

"Whatever can it be?" said Maud; and she flung on her dressing-gown and went out. But though she searched the house all through, she found nothing wrong, nothing broken, nothing displaced, nothing of any kind to account for the noise. Still the sound had been so loud and of so startling a character, that neither of them could sleep again, so they kept their light burning and talked. Keziah related to her friend how she had wandered along the road to Wolverhampton in the night time, and then how a break came, and she could remember nothing until she awoke in one of the wards of the Wolverhampton Hospital; and she was told she had had a fever. When she was well enough to go out, they had given her the money they had found in her clothes, and she had come straight to Manchester.

Then about dawn, Keziah fell asleep again; and Maud remained awake. The sound she had heard had been exactly like the smashing of the hall-lamp by something falling upon it. When daylight came, she was glad indeed to end a night of wondering and silence.

She was dressing herself when a postman's knock came to the door.

"How early the post is this morning," she thought.

It was not a letter; it was a telegram. She swayed and fell, crying, in a suffocating voice, "My darling's dead, he's dead."

Keziah, weak though she was, gained her side, picked up and read the telegram.

Yes, he was dead.

Maud lost her consciousness entirely. And when at last she came to herself, it was only to cry, "He is dead ! and now he will never learn to love me again." She became so ill that a servant was despatched for a doctor. He ordered what is always ordered in such cases, and can never be obtained—rest. And the day wore on, and Keziah and Maud wept in company. They were both widows now.

The next morning a letter of particulars came. Tom Towers had passed his examination, and had gone to his hotel, and right up to his room, which was at the top. And by accident, it was believed, he had fallen over the banisters from the top to the bottom of that great building, smashing the hall lamp by his fall.

Inside was a letter addressed, in his handwriting, to his wife. "Read it, Kizzy," she said, "for I cannot." Kizzy opened it and read, with dilated eyes and horror in her face :—

"I have passed my examination, Maud, my own much-loved wife ; and shall end it all to-night. Shall I tell you why ? I can bear life no longer. It was I who committed the murder poor Elworthy was accused of. I did not mean to do it, I swear I did not. I ought, perhaps, to have died and never told you. But you might hear of it some way. You would bear it better coming from me. The money I have had from you at different times has been to purchase the silence of a man who saw me commit the deed.

"And now, with my last words, I beg you to forgive me, and to believe how well I have loved you. The man will trouble you no more when I am gone. You will, I know, believe I did not mean to do it. And now I enter on another world, where we may yet meet, if God pardons me, as I am sure you will.

"YOUR HEARTBROKEN HUSBAND."

Keziah did not show this letter to Maud for a day or two ; not till a verdict had been given, at the inquest, of "Accidental death, due to over-excitement from examination."

Maud never saw his body, and never even saw the coffin. She felt it would have killed her. He was buried in Manchester, in the cemetery where she had so often walked.

CHAPTER XLIX.

JUBAL INSTRUCTS HIS UNCLE IN THE WAYS OF SOCIETY.

IN the afternoon of a very dull Saturday in January, two years after Keziah Hackbit and Maud Towers were made widows, preparations were being made at The Chestnuts at Bowdon, for a party which Mr. David Rimmon was to give to some of his nephew's friends. Jubal, who now boasts of something more than down on his upper lip and has grown broader and handsomer, stands with his back towards the drawing-room fire, his hands thrust into his trouser pockets, and his head poised superciliously. David, anxious and nervous, watches his nephew's face as if to learn his content or discontent in it.

"Well, Jubal," he remarked, passing one hand through his hair, which was growing very scanty now, "does the room look like other people's now? Do you like it?"

"Well, really, uncle," replied Jubal, breaking into a light laugh, and showing a shining row of teeth, "as I chose all the things, it would be praising myself if I said I liked them."

David hooked both his thumbs into the arm-holes of his waistcoat, and looked quizzically at his nephew. "Yes, of course, Jubal," he said; "but is the furniture properly put in the room? You see I've no other room to compare it with."

"Oh, yes," Jubal allowed, "it looks well enough." He had got into the way of not expressing much pleasure at anything. "And, uncle, if you don't mind my mentioning it, perhaps it may be as well that you should not put your thumbs in your waistcoat arm-holes before the fellows that are coming here. Fellows are apt to take these things for indications, you know. And," he added, without noticing the manner in which poor David removed the thumbs in question, "don't you think really now you could manage to use h's, just a little? I shouldn't like to hear the fellows describe you as 'young Rimmon's uncle, innocent of h's.' I'm sure Medwin laughed when you asked him to come to your 'ouse; and, after all, it's a simple enough matter to say 'house,' and so much hangs on it."

Poor David was completely in a flutter; and all the more likely to show badly before the "fellows" on that account. "You see, Jubal," he said, not at all crossly, "I never had much schooling; I went to work when I was ——"

"And there's another thing," said Jubal, flushing. "Pray, don't refer to the time when you went to work."

There was almost impatience in the tone in which David replied to this. "It may be an easy matter to you, Jubal. But at my time of life it's no easy matter. I have managed to get on, and make a little money without h's; though I am sure, I didn't know that I talked any different to other people, before."

"That's what I thought," said Jubal, "and for that reason I draw your attention to it. Don't imagine that I wish to hurt your feelings."

But Jubal had hurt his uncle's feelings, and very deeply too; and he, with his native gentlemanliness, which existed despite his lack of h's, did not turn upon his nephew with a rude rejoinder, as that young gentleman would certainly have done, could they have exchanged places. Neither did he wound Jubal's feelings by telling him of the wound he had inflicted, thereby proving himself the true gentleman; for are not all the rules of society founded upon this basis, the avoidance of open wounding of the feelings of others?

"I don't mind altering anything," said David, "if I am able to do it, and it's for your welfare."

"I thought you'd take it like that," returned Jubal. "You're an awfully good fellow."

If Jubal imagined that this salve would heal the wound he had inflicted, he was mistaken. He had robbed his uncle of confidence, and given him mistrust of himself in place of it. He had called his uncle a bear, and thought that patting him on the head, and saying, "Good fellow," as he might have done to a dog, would quite make up for it. He might have remembered that even a dog who has been well thrashed, rather resents than is grateful for the pats upon the sore places given him in token of reconciliation. But on the strength of David's saying nothing more than we have recorded, Jubal thought he would continue the lesson which had been so well received, having no penetration into the real state of his uncle's feelings; as those who do not love scarcely ever have.

"And you know, uncle," he went on, "gentlemen don't say 'Sir' one another. In fact, there's little necessity for calling anyone anything. If you have occasion to use a name at all, you from your position might use the surname alone, as soon as you know them a little; otherwise you can say 'Mr. So-and-So,' but never 'Sir.'"

"Well, that is strange," said David. "I was brought up to think 'Sir' the right thing."

"Never mind what your bringing up was," returned Jubal. "I'll tell you the way to treat these fellows. You must pretend to look down on them instead of up to them."

"Is there any necessity at all for that?" said David. "Why should there be looking down or looking up?"

"That's just what it is," Jubal replied. "There's always looking down and looking up. And so you must look down on these fellows, or they'll soon reckon you up. You mustn't remember anything except that you're a manufacturer and a rich man; and these fellows may be swells and all that, but I can tell you, between ourselves, they often don't know which way to turn for money; so you've no need to let them look down on you. And now, uncle, if you don't object, I'll put you into your suit, so that you may have time to get used to it a bit."

This suit was of a pattern such as David had never had on before. But, as Jubal had told his uncle, he dressed altogether out of his position.

"Yes, I'll put the suit on if you like, Jubal. I'm afraid it won't look very well on me. And you didn't tell me what these round tables are for, Jubal."

"Oh, never mind about that," replied his nephew. "Come and have your clothes on."

As they passed out at the door, David looked back ruefully at his metamorphosed drawing-room. It was very pretty, with its rose-coloured curtains and furniture, pale carpet, and strange cabinets. But David's drawing-room was gone. He could never take a Sunday afternoon nap on *that* couch. It made him tremble even to think of it. In fact, he couldn't use the room for anything any more. Everything was gone that he wanted, and everything there was useless to him; and there was a great deal of disappointment in his mind when he looked at the spot formerly occupied by an old-fashioned bureau which would open out, and on which he wrote his letters, and in the drawer of which he kept his camomile flowers, from which he made herb tea, as he called it. It was hard to see this spot occupied by a perfectly useless thing with glass in front, through which could be seen a number of very ugly curiosities. However, it had been inevitable, as the new suit proved to be.

"There, uncle, you'll look something like, now," said young Rimmon, standing at a little distance for the purpose of judging the effect of this new tailoring achievement.

"It doesn't feel very comfortable," David remarked, ruefully. "It's too tight round the waist. I must undo this button."

"Oh, no; you mustn't do anything of the sort. That would spoil the effect entirely. You'll soon get used to it. And, you see, when that's buttoned you won't forget and put your thumbs in your waistcoat armholes, or your waistcoat pocket."

"It's very hot and uncomfortable up here," said David feeling towards his chest. "It seems too thick somehow."

"If it's hot, all the better this cold weather. They always put a bit of padding in there; it makes the coat sit well. You'll get to like it."

"But, really, I can assure you, Jubal," said his uncle, in some concern, "I can't wear these shoes. They hurt me. I'm sure they're two sizes too small."

"You didn't say so in the shop. Besides, it's all rubbish. If people have been used to wearing boots on their feet, they're sure to fancy their feet are confined too closely in a pair of ordinary shoes."

"But why can't I put on the pair of slippers that Kizzy worked for me?" pleaded David.

"Oh, if you're going to get obstinate," said Jubal, pretending to get vexed.

"I'll try to get used to them," said David. "Perhaps, if I walk about in them, they'll get easier." And he made the attempt.

"Oh-h-h," cried Jubal, aghast. "You mustn't limp about like that. The fellows'll roar."

"Perhaps they'll get easier just now," said poor David, "or else I shall really be obliged to take them off."

"Oh, bless you, you'll get used to it, uncle. Everybody's boots hurt them, only they pretend they don't. I'm sure mine do; and, you see, you've always the advantage of being able to put on some big shoes when nobody's here."

David was silent. He was ruminating. If society made such demands as these, it must surely have some big return to give. David could not exactly see any return, but then that was his ignorance.

Taking advantage of the silence, Jubal went on talking.

"I'm glad that the waiter has arrived in good time. I shall go in and give him some directions. And mind you don't treat him as if he's a stranger, and had in for the evening. You must order him about well,

you know. And you mustn't say 'please' to him, nor 'thank you ;' people never do that in society."

Poor David felt himself in a labyrinth of new formalities and ideas. He knew his troubles were not over. Children are to be pitied sometimes when, under merciless teachers, they tread their first steps towards learning ; but how much more the old pupil who takes his first lessons at the tyrannical and merciless school of society.

CHAPTER L.

JUBAL'S FRIENDS.

As eight o'clock approached, the bell rang, and David trembled. He had been told by Jubal that he must receive the guests, and he inwardly wished that the earth would receive him. But the earth is not kindly in this respect ; and though for indefinite centuries she has been frequently called upon to perform this office, she has but rarely been known to accede to the demand, and in these few cases the result has probably not produced all the satisfaction desired.

The waiter announced the Honourable Pelham Winterfold and Mr. Allan Denleigh. David nervously shook hands, and slunk into the background, while the new arrivals exchanged greetings of a freer kind with the nephew, whom they called "Rimmon." They appeared to have dined, and were in strikingly high spirits.

"Snug little place you have here," remarked Winterfold, addressing David, who started violently, and muttered something inaudible.

"Yes, quite so," assented Mr. Denleigh, throwing himself unceremoniously upon one of the new satin chairs, and shaking out a highly-scented handkerchief before applying it to the prominent feature of his face.

"Are we to play high or low to-night ?" inquired Winterfold, backing towards the fire, and remaining stationary in front of it.

"As far as I am concerned," said Mr. Denleigh, in a high treble, "half crowns are all the pieces I am worth. Played out, you know, last night. Awful bad luck. We were all at Springwood's. Deuced hot time of it. Springwood *père* won everything."

"He's a trifle *too* sharp," replied Winterfold. "But, you see, one must be willing to pay a little for one's pleasures ; and his daughters are deucedly fine girls."

"Winterfold's going to induce the youngest to marry him and leave the stage," said Denleigh, winking at Jubal. "She'd make a charming 'my lady,' some day."

"Thanks," said Winterfold, without moving any feature except his upper lip, which curled slightly. "Marrying's not in my line. Besides, I don't consider that Miss Juliet or her sisters would be much good in electioneering, and everything depends on a man's wife if he has a Parliamentary career before him; doesn't it, Mr. Rimmon?" he said, appealing to David.

David was so much aghast at what he had heard, that he could not stammer out a word of reply. He had not understood the conversation in the least; but he was under the impression that all was not right. So he pretended not to hear when Winterfold addressed him, and examined a picture on the wall, as if he had never seen it before.

"You'd do a lot in Parliament," remarked Jubal; "you need to have a wife who would do something. And I don't think Miss Juliet can do anything, unless it's dancing; she can't act at all: and as for singing—well, I can't think what Springwood's dreaming about, to put in so many songs for her."

"Well, you see," Winterfold rejoined, "the British theatre-goer has not a very good ear for music, and she always gets applauded. But whatever be her merits, she's not for me, even if I wished it. She's already the secret property of a certain judge who often dines at my father's table, and preaches morality to my young brothers and sisters."

Another ring at the bell. "Mr. Sheridan Springwood and Mr. Richmond Scratch" were announced. Another ordeal for David ensued. He went through it better this time, however, as he thought. In shaking hands with Mr. Springwood, he remarked with cordiality, "Why, I knew someone of your name, Mr. Springwood; I wonder if it was a relation of yours."

"Very likely, indeed," replied that gentleman, cheerfully. "I've a great many about." At which there was a loud laugh, for which David saw no reason. "Where did the people live that you knew?" went on Mr. Springwood, with the utmost good humour, while Mr. Scratch kept as close to him as he conveniently could, his head perched on one side, taking it all in.

"In Staffordshire," said David, "the Springwoods lived I knew. They were buttly colliers, and worked in the Troworth Hill mines."

"In that case," broke in Denleigh, "I can answer for it they were no

relatives of this Springwood, who is most highly connected in every way, I can assure you ;" upon which there was another loud laugh, in which everybody joined except Springwood, who appeared rather annoyed, and curtly disclaimed the relationship.

"Don't look black, Springwood," said Winterfold, aggravatingly, "or else you'll have Scratch writing a paragraph about you, in which he will say that the admirable manner in which this gentleman personifies Othello can only be accounted for by those who have the privilege of knowing him in private."

"If I couldn't write any better than that," said Mr. Scratch, indignantly, "I shouldn't have been so successful as I have been."

"Ah, to be sure," chimed in Denleigh, "you write paragraphs for the *Police News* now, don't you?"

"If I did," replied Scratch, hotly, "it might be possible that you would figure in one of them."

"Oh, oh," broke from the rest of them.

Mr. Sheridan Springwood had received a deeper wound than appeared on the surface ; for he had never yet played Othello, though he was most ambitious to do so, and had a dreamy notion that he might have made this desire of his public after taking a little too much brandy. He looked upon himself as a spirit in chains, for he was at present playing Blue Beard in his father's theatre, where nothing beyond low burlesque was ever attempted. David felt sorry for him, though he did not in the least comprehend the situation.

"Are you fond of acting, sir?" asked Mr. Rimmon, forgetting his part.

"I am obliged to be, whether I am or not," replied the actor. "It is my profession."

"Oh, indeed !" said Mr. Rimmon, looking at him with a new interest. "I was not aware of that." And he stared at him, thinking within himself that an actor looked uncommonly like an ordinary man.

"I don't know what we've got to amuse you, gentlemen," went on David. "We might get up a charade, as you are fond of acting." A great roar of laughter followed this bold suggestion, in which all joined except Jubal, who looked very angry, and remarked that they were not infants in arms, any of them, and that they would have a rubber of whist, as soon as the other fellows should arrive. They did arrive before he had done speaking ; and were announced : "Mr. Rufus Harris, Mr. Hanson, and Mr. Medwin."

After a hurried touch of hands, the gentlemen placed themselves round two of the tables, and David saw now what they were for. Packs of cards began to be shuffled. At the table nearest to David, Winterfold, Denleigh, Springwood, and Scratch were seated ; at the other, the rest of the party.

The waiter here came in with glasses and bottles, much to David's astonishment ; and feeling himself quite like a fish out of water, he made his escape through the open door, that he might be able to breathe a little. Returning to the room in the course of half-an-hour, he found it in a state of uproar. A sharp altercation was going on between Winterfold and the comedian, in which a glass had been knocked off the table and smashed ; at which Mr. Scratch abstractedly aimed an empty bottle. David could hardly believe his eyes. He was still more startled when he observed Mr. Denleigh gathering up half-crowns, and pocketing them with a delighted smile.

"They must be gambling," thought David. But Jubal assured him this was not the case ; that each man would be given back all his half-crowns at the end, when the party broke up ; which statement was received with a burst of applause by the company, and which poor David took in.

David didn't smoke, and the drawing-room was getting really stifling, by means of the fumes of eight cigars, and he was literally compelled to absent himself. This he did rather unwillingly ; for he was in fact anything but easy at the course things seemed to be taking. Not knowing what else to do with himself, he went into his dining-room, where an elaborate supper was laid ; and he dreaded the moment when he should have to sit at the head of it.

The noise in the drawing-room increased. He heard a crash, which he afterwards discovered to be caused by the fall of some of the glass pendants from the chandeliers, at which Mr. Scratch had aimed another bottle. Random throwing was always a feature in his form of drunkenness. David thought he would quite as soon enter a lion's den as go back into the drawing-room. He waited for them to break loose upon him in the dining-room, when they should choose to have supper, which they did soon after twelve.

The drawing-room door was flung open, and the party came out quite steadily, to David's great surprise ; they did not appear to be very drunk. Jubal placed Winterfold at David's right hand. The rest took their seats as they liked, and with an air of being perfectly at home.

"No journal'll get any paragraph from you, Scratch," remarked Hanson, who was sitting next to him. "You've not been looking out for anything, you know."

"Oh, indeed," replied Mr. Scratch, trying to fix his eye upon the speaker, but failing in the attempt; for that organ would wander all about the room indefinitely, and his mouth was stretched into a strange smile, though he was in anything but a good humour.

"It's a mystery how he lives at all," said Medwin, who was upon the other side of Hanson. "He's always sending in wrong information."

"That's quite true," admitted Mr. Scratch. "You see, when there's no information, what's one to do?"

David heard this, and asked in some anxiety, "Am I to understand, Mr. Scratch, that you invent things to send as news to the papers?"

"Well, you see, I must live," was the reply.

David forgot to go on carving for a moment. He was thinking within himself that this accounted for statements in the papers getting contradicted the next day. At last David went on with his work, and with a valiant effort entered into conversation with Winterfold, who was helping himself to the wine rather freely, as indeed most of the company seemed to be doing, without ceremony.

"My nephew tells me you are at Cambridge," he began (he nearly said "sir").

"Well," replied Winterfold, with an approach to a grin, "I was there."

"Ah," said David, "it's the vacation now, isn't it? When will you be returning?"

This question was greeted with laughter, especially by Denleigh, who explained to David that Winterfold was "down" for a year.

"Down?" said David, interrogatively.

"That is, he's not to go back to Cambridge for a year."

"Oh," said David, "I understand you. Your health gave way, I suppose, sir?"

"Well, no," replied Winterfold, who certainly did look in pretty good health. "I was sent down. Had a difference with the tutor, you know."

"Yes," chimed in Denleigh; "and it was an awful shame, for he would have been sure to have come out Senior Wrangler, if he had stayed up."

David, out of politeness, felt obliged to continue the conversation. "It must be very pleasant at Cambridge. I passed through it once, on my way to Ely, and I thought it looked very solemn."

"You've never seen a degree day, have you, Mr. Rimmon?" broke in Denleigh, tossing off a glass of wine as he spoke.

David confessed that he had not.

"Very solemn," said Winterfold, "very. I got sent down because I smiled at one. You're not allowed to smile in the Senate House. And yet it's difficult not to do so when you're so full of pleasure at the sight of so much greatness. The Public Orator makes a speech in Latin."

"Rather difficult to follow, isn't it?" asked Mr. Rimmon.

"Oh, no, not at all," asserted Winterfold. "We're examined in it after."

"I don't quite understand," said David.

"This is it," put in Denleigh, winking at Winterfold. "They think it well in the universities to train spontaneous memory, and one of the means is to reproduce the Public Orator's speech."

"And when have you to do this? Soon afterwards?" asked David.

"The following Sunday," answered Winterfold. "Just before the sermon at the 'Varsity Church."

"I didn't know they had anything of that sort in churches," David remarked, considerably astonished. "But I should like to know how they give the degrees."

"Well, the Vice-Chancellor, you know, he sits at one end."

"Does he sit waiting for them to come in?" inquired David, trying to get details.

"Oh, no. He has to march three times round the town first, in gorgeous robes, preceded by two big fellows with silver pokers, and masks on; and then they walk all the way up the Senate House, when it's full, to have better effect; after which the Vice-Chancellor sits down, as I told you."

"Is anybody allowed to go in?" asked David.

"Oh, yes. And it gets pretty full, I can tell you."

"I suppose you cheer your friends when they take their degree," David observed.

Winterfold shook his head. "Oh, no, we're not allowed to speak in the Senate House."

"It's very strange," replied David, "but I've somewhere got hold of another impression about that."

"Misinformed," said Denleigh, "misinformed."

"The best lark is when there are some honorary degrees," continued

Winterfold. "Those fellows who are going to have a degree given them, always look twice as grand as anybody else. They quite patronise the Vice-Chancellor, and look up with a lofty scorn at the galleries, where we undergraduates are packed like so many herrings. No doubt they would like us to applaud, but, you see, we're not allowed. Only wish they'd got the Little-go to go in for," went on the speaker, with considerable warmth; "they'd find it out, and perhaps they wouldn't be up taking their degree quite so soon. A lot of 'em came and dined at our college, at the high table, where I used to dine, being a fellow-commoner, you know."

"What do they talk about, now?" said David, addressing the fellow-commoner.

"Awful rot," replied Winterfold. "They did nothing but pay each other compliments. I know one was trying not to get out of temper with another—something about the weight of the world. One said it weighed a quarter of an ounce more than the other; and that's how it was, I think."

"I say, Fuss," said Denleigh to Rufus Harris, who was usually so nicknamed by his friends, "do you remember when Professor Stargazer had his degree?"

"I remember what followed it, if I don't remember that," answered Harris.

"What was it?" inquired Scratch, anticipating a paragraph.

"You'd better ask Winterfold; he knows most about it."

"He wasn't my friend, at any rate. It was my father he knew," broke out Winterfold, indignantly. "I don't know what he called at my rooms for. I didn't want to see him, I'm sure."

"Then why did you offer to take him to see the boats?"

"I didn't. It was he who asked me to go with him."

"Well, you needn't have led him through such frightful mire," went on Harris. "Besides, it didn't look dignified to see him running by the side of the river, as you made him. And it was too bad to get him in such a mess."

"I suppose he knew what the river banks were likely to be when he asked," returned Winterfold.

"He didn't, I'll swear."

"Well, he wasn't disgusted with me, at any rate, for he came into breakfast with me next morning, and a deuced lot it cost. However, I hadn't to pay for it; it went down in the bill."

"Do you have breakfast in your own rooms, then?" asked David, breaking in once more.

"Oh, yes," replied Winterfold, "if a pint of coffee and a roll and butter can be called breakfast."

"Really now, are you not allowed to choose what you like?"

"Oh, no, not at all. Plainest possible diet, regulated strictly. Harris had the time of it; he lodged out, up in Lily Crescent; and he passed the evenings throwing toast into the opposite windows, where another fellow lodged. There are shops underneath, and the toast fell on the people who went into them sometimes, and lumps of sugar too."

"Who was it started the toast-throwing," put in Denleigh, "I should like to know? Both of you were in my rooms at the time, at any rate."

"Yes; and I recollect," observed Denleigh, "that you locked us in the room till after twelve, and got us gated."

"Really," said David, "I had no idea that gentlemen went to universities to amuse themselves—really I hadn't."

The three undergraduates laughed on hearing this. "Look here, Mr. Rimmon," said Harris, with great solemnity, "I saved both these men from ruin once. The proctor got wind of us, and the slavey let him into the house. You've no idea what awful slaveys those lodging-house ones are. There ought to be a university regulation to make them wash themselves; you'd say so if you could see one. Well, when I heard the proctor coming upstairs——"

"What is a proctor?" asked David.

"Oh, a kind of university policeman," replied Harris. "I just locked the door, and let those two swarm down a rope I've got, into the street, and there they were, you know; and I made out there was something the matter with the lock, until they had got clean off, down the rope at any rate. When the proctor came in, he saw only me and my reading-lamp and my books. He was quite amazed when I asked him if anything were the matter—quite politely, you may be sure. He said he certainly thought he heard an uproar coming from this very window. I suggested the rooms opposite as the seat of the disturbance, and complained of the difficulty of working while there was such a row."

"That was a very narrow escape," said David. "I hope it was a lesson to you all."

"Oh," remarked Springwood, derisively, "I don't call that anything of a situation."

"You try it, that's all," said Denleigh, hotly.

"He'll try a rope in another position," suggested Scratch, who was getting rather far gone, and hiccupped considerably.

"I'm not going to give you the pleasure of writing that paragraph," retorted Springwood. "You had better learn to make use of those you have. Oh," he said, turning to Hanson, "I wish I had half that fellow's chances. He's always losing them. Only the other day he was sent specially to report on the health of a certain member of Parliament who had been lying at the point of death, and while he was waiting for latest details, he hanged if he didn't go and get drunk; and when the details were given him, he couldn't understand a word of it, and there was nothing in the paper next morning about it."

"But there was a jolly row," Scratch allowed.

"I wonder they had any more to do with you on the paper," observed Medwin, who said very little, but generally managed to make that little offensive.

"They knew whom to value," said Scratch, laboriously. "It's more than you seem to."

"I tell you another thing Scratch did," remarked Hanson. "Young Rimmon doesn't know it, I think. He went to a great temperance meeting, where Lord Winterfold was presiding."

"Ah," said Winterfold, appreciatively, "my dad's awful on the teetotal question."

"You haven't imbibed much of his spirit, at any rate," put in Jubal, laughing.

"I prefer to imbibe spirit of another sort," replied Winterfold. This was pretty evident from his action at this moment.

The gentleman about whom the story was to be told began a devil's tattoo on the table with two glasses, to drown the voice of the narrator.

Mr. Hanson only raised his voice, and was perfectly audible; while Medwin, who was his supporter in all things, took the glasses from Scratch's hands, and flung them quietly under the table, for which he was applauded.

"I say Scratch went to this meeting, where Lord Winterfold was presiding; sent on purpose to report his speech; and he hanged if he didn't go drunk to the meeting and fall asleep in the middle of it; and just half of the speech was reported in the paper next day, and the compositor had to make something up to round it off a bit."

"It wasn't the compositor," exclaimed the indignant Scratch, "who rounded it off."

"That's quite immaterial to the story," said Medwin. "Somebody had to round it off, at any rate, whether it was the compositor or the devil."

And yet he wasn't turned off the paper," said Hanson. "Here you behold him flourishing like a green bay tree. You wouldn't take him to be a poet, now, to look at him," went on his tormentor.

The whole company agreed that they certainly should not.

"Well, it's all through a poem he wrote, that got published in the *Kangaroo*, that he got his position. He was only a penny-a-liner before then; and now he can take what he likes."

Scratch suggested that he should like to take some cherry brandy, and forthwith he helped himself, after which he turned very affectionately to Springwood, and announced his intention of dying if Juliet did not return his affection. "She cares no more for me," said the journalist, "than if I were nobody," which was probably the truth.

David began to be alarmed at the prospect of some private revelation. None followed, however. But Scratch fervently promised Springwood that he would write the best notice imaginable, about the new burlesque then coming on.

"Look here, old fellow," he said, "you shall write down what you want me to say, and I'll put it in form."

So Springwood and Scratch shook hands, and Scratch invited himself to lunch at Springwood's the following Monday, where he would catch a glimpse of Miss Juliet before she went to rehearsal.

Here, without any prelude, Mr. Denleigh announced in song his intention of not going home till morning. All the company, except David, joined him in this, and a great noise ensued.

It was about three o'clock in the morning, when a flood of light shot across the path from The Chestnuts, and seven rollicking figures turned out, still insisting that they were not going home till morning. Most of them had not far to go, fortunately. But Springwood and Scratch had to get into the heart of Manchester, somehow. As a matter of fact they didn't get home at all that night, owing to Mr. Scratch's sitting down on a stone in the high road, and refusing to stir, declaring in sepulchral tones, that this was the headstone of the grave of his fallen genius.

As for Jubal, he was stretched at full length under the dining-room table, until his uncle and the waiter carried him upstairs; the former, wretched and dazed, not in the least knowing what action to take, and repenting as bitterly that he had adopted Jubal.

CHAPTER LI.

THE DENLEIGHS.

ABOUT two miles outside Bowdon was a dreary stretch of land, productive chiefly of thistles. A widish brook intersected this piece of waste, and pollard willows of gaunt and weird proportions flourished on its banks. No other trees were to be seen, with the exception of three solitary straight poplars that stood sentinel over a bed of osiers. The land was put to no sort of use, and had a man-and-God-forsaken aspect, rarely to be met with, but not easily to be forgotten. No cows grazed there, no cottagers made use of the deserted place to turn pigs or ducks out, no birds ever seemed to be singing in its immediate neighbourhood ; not even a donkey browsed there, though his favourite herb was most abundant. A narrow footpath lay right across it by the side of the brook, and finally crossed the brook by a little bridge, with a rail on one side only. The path was not much worn, as there was a more direct road than across these fields to almost anywhere it could lead to. At one season of the year it nearly always became flooded.

The people who owned this land lived in an old-fashioned great house, situate in a valley about half a mile distant from it. The reader might conclude either that there was no master to this establishment, or that he was abroad. Neither was the case. Colonel Denleigh scarcely ever left the house, which every one else in it devoutly wished he could leave. They led but a dreary life, except when the colonel's nephew and a chance friend came home from Cambridge. Mrs. Denleigh, a tall lady with much to boast of in the way of ancestors, and an indescribable air of never for a moment forgetting that she used to be young and good-looking, invited such society as could be got together, considering that her husband was a confirmed invalid, and a thought too likely to quarrel, and that she was encumbered with a rather plain daughter, who, if she did not know that she was plain, had the lesson pretty well drummed into her in her daily contact with her worthy parents. It will be imagined that Winterfold's advent was a perfect godsend. "For who knows," said Mrs. Denleigh to her husband, when he was in a rather better temper than usual, which was not saying much, "but what he may marry Amelia off our hands? I do think there's nothing so disagreeable and irritating as to see a girl metamorphosed into an old maid under one's very eyes."

"None of the other fellows that have come here have married her," retorted her husband, snappishly. "Everybody isn't such a born fool as I was."

Mrs. Denleigh was so accustomed to this kind of remark that she went on without noticing it. "It's of no use to take Amelia to dinner parties and to balls. She doesn't show there. She shines in a domestic light. Therefore, if we wish to marry her, we must bring young men to stay in the house and see what she is."

"If she shines in a domestic light," said the irritable father, "it's more than her mother does."

This conversation, with slight variations, took place at least once or twice in every vacation, when Allan proposed to bring a friend home.

On the Sunday morning following the party at The Chestnuts, the colonel, with the aid of the butler and one or two more servants, had been landed in the breakfast parlour, and was angrily looking out on a dreary stretch of lawn, and a partially frozen fishpond at the bottom of it. There was no newspaper, and this always vexed him. It was the one drawback to Sunday, in his opinion. For this reason it was but peevishly that he replied to the greeting of Winterfold, who entered the room as faded-looking as any painted beauty appears at her breakfast-table after a night's revel.

"Morning," grunted the colonel.

"Think we shall have any skating?" asked Winterfold, rubbing his bloodshot eyes with a silk handkerchief.

"How can I tell?" replied the colonel. "The weather's nothing to do with me. I wish they'd bring that breakfast in. Where's Allan?"

"Here, uncle," said that gentleman, entering the room as washed-out as his companion. "Do you want me for anything?"

"Where's Amelia?"

"Hang it all, uncle, what's up with you this morning?"

The colonel made no reply, but continued to scowl through the window.

When Amelia came in, had nodded to her cousin and his companion, and kissed the colonel's forehead, she seated herself at the table to dispense the breakfast, which had been brought in on her entrance. Perhaps she was a trifle plain, but she looked very pleasant, which was a credit to her in such a place.

"Are you going to help me up to the table or not?" said the colonel to his nephew.

"Why, certainly, sir," replied that individual. "But you might ask in a different manner." And Winterfold on one side, and Denleigh on the other, escorted the bristling colonel to his accustomed seat.

Conversation was not readily made, as the two younger gentlemen had headaches; the elder gentleman, a general ache all over, produced by combined rheumatism and gout, which, in fact, had crippled him. As for Amelia, she never talked much—perhaps because her elders had set her the example of talking a great deal more than they should have done. She did, however, ask if her cousin and Mr. Winterfold were going to church with her.

"We may as well go," said Denleigh, to his companion rather than in answer to his cousin. "We may see those girls."

"What girls?" inquired the colonel.

"Well, to tell you the truth, we don't know," replied Allan; "but we know where they live, and I wish aunt would call on their folks."

"What are they like?" the colonel proceeded to ask, with a show of interest.

"Rather difficult to describe," said his nephew. "They are both tall. But I think the dark one's the prettiest. She's more piquant, at any rate."

The colonel, who was always desirous to add to his acquaintance any good-looking women, mentally resolved that his wife should call upon them, whoever they were, and invite them to his next dinner, if they could be got to come. But he remarked aloud, not being able to express this to his wife at the moment, that he did wish Mrs. Denleigh would leave off that habit of having breakfast in bed, and come down, as any other lady would.

Before breakfast was finished, Mrs. Denleigh did arrive, but dressed for church.

"Look here, aunt," began Allan at once, "I'll show you those young ladies I spoke of to-day. They are sure to be at church, and uncle wants you to call on them."

"Which I shall not do until I can find out who they are," said the proud lady, with a haughty and disdainful look at her husband. "If army gentlemen are content to make indiscriminate acquaintances, they can scarcely expect their wives to follow suit."

That morning after church Denleigh managed to get the Rector's wife to introduce the ladies in question to his aunt. After a few commonplace remarks, the ladies passed on, and Mrs. Denleigh asked the Rector's wife who they were.

"They are two widows who live together," was the reply. "Very quiet, and keep a great deal to themselves, I have heard. My husband has been insisting that I should get them out."

"But do you mean to tell me," said Mrs. Denleigh, "that that one with the short black curls is a widow? She doesn't look out of her teens."

"She is a widow, and has a little boy. I have seen him out with his nurse. But she is very cross-grained, and will hardly let you look at the child."

A few minutes later, as they were walking along the road bordering on the waste land we have spoken of, Winterfold descried two black figures moving leisurely along at the side of the brook. He indicated the fact to his friend; and when once the ladies of their own party had turned round the corner which led into their own grounds, Winterfold and Denleigh made a simultaneous rush towards the little bridge that led across the brook into the waste land, and then walked leisurely enough towards the two black advancing figures.

"We must take off our hats, because, you see, we have been introduced," said Winterfold. "We've no need to wait for them." They were quite close to the ladies now, and off went the hats. The two girls bowed slightly and gravely, and passed on, talking together.

The young men were now uncertain what to do. "We may as well go on to the high road," said Denleigh. "They are bound to come back this way, unless they go by the high road; for that way leads nowhere except to our place. Hang it, who's that fellow?"

Someone was coming from the high road on to the waste land. "He's either going to our house or else following them. Deuced cheek, whichever it is." And as the stranger passed by them, they greeted him with a haughty stare, which he returned with one equally haughty.

CHAPTER III.

A DAY OF MISTAKES.

THE gentleman who overtook Keziah and Maud, began in a measured voice of suppressed agitation—

"Kizzy, I have done as you told me. I have not come near you till the time is up. It has been very hard; but I have obeyed you."

Keziah crimsoned and trembled, but did not speak. She looked

piteously at her companion. Then turning to Elworthy, she said, wearily—

"Why did you come to me? I am not worth the trouble. I have been frozen up and no thaw has come. I have no right to any happiness yet."

"Ah," said Maud, "how are you to thaw, if you will never let the sun shine on you? I tell you, Kizzy, it is time to have done with this sort of thing. The way you have kept Dr. Elworthy at a distance these two years, is, in my opinion, as grave a mistake as the other one. There is no kind of sense in it. Of course, you must come home and have lunch with us, Dr. Elworthy."

"You are very good, Mrs. Towers," replied the doctor. "I will come." And without any hesitation, he placed Keziah's little black-gloved hand on his arm; and they walked quietly on.

Maud took Keziah's bonnet upstairs for her, bidding her stay where she was with the doctor. Left thus in the dining room, these two fell into an embarrassed state scarcely to be imagined. It was Keziah who spoke first.

"What a strange thing it is, Rupert, to be past enjoyment," she began.

"Yes, the state must be a strange one," returned Rupert, sadly. "But such as you and I can only conjecture about it."

Keziah shook her head. "No," she said, "I feel very, very old, and think more about the time when I shall be laid in my grave, than of any new life such as opens to many girls of my age."

"You think in that way, because you have never let me come to see you."

"Shall I tell you the truth?"

"If you know it."

"I wish you had not come now."

He looked at her reproachfully

"I had begun to grow calm," went on the girl, "to become a little reconciled. Why need you awaken the struggle again?"

"Kizzy," he said, painfully, "I don't think I understand you rightly. It sounds as if after all I have given up for your sake, and after all I have suffered—it sounds—oh, heavens, I can hardly think of it. It sounds as if you meant to give me up."

"Oh," returned Keziah, bitterly, "I am not like other girls. You have thought me free; but I have not been free. I have a sin to expiate.

Why couldn't you have let me alone? It would have been kinder; kinder and better in every way. There is only this one thing left that I can do," she went on. "Perhaps I can atone a little in this way. Had I been a better wife, and never met you at all—for that was very wrong, I see it all now—my husband might never have drunk himself to death."

"Kizzy," began Elworthy, his tender look giving place to one of sternness and some indignation, "can you still maintain a desperate allegiance to a departed man who never truly loved you, and whom you never could have loved? It can do him no good, and you nothing but harm. Were I like other men, I might have told you that you broke faith with me first. But I have been patient, too patient. In your letter you only asked for time. I yielded to you, as I have in everything. But you can never have cared for me really; not as I have cared for you, or I am sure you could not have kept me at a distance so long, when you were free." This he said, hoping to call forth from her some declaration of love.

She held her head averted. "I cannot be as if none of these things had ever been," she said. "If I married you, could I be happy? I should always be reverting to the past. I should make you miserable; and I should be miserable myself. I think I am played out. I am fit for nothing but the kind of life I am leading now. I think," she added, with a wistful smile, "if I were a Catholic, I should go into a convent."

"Well, Keziah," said her old lover, with gravity, and nothing more, in his tone, and with his eyes looking quite away from her, "it seems to me that there is only one person you have utterly lost sight of, and treated ungenerously in all this; and that is myself. Love can live through scorn, and separation, and almost everything except cold apathy. Keziah, ask yourself, would it make no difference to you if I were to tell you that my love was played out?"

She started, and fixed her great eyes on him, if possible to read more in his face than his words had implied.

"Rupert," she said, "I have prayed that that should happen"—he winced—"but that is because my love for you can never change, and has never changed." Here, by a mighty effort, she controlled herself so as to show no emotion, but only fixedness of purpose.

"Then all I can say is," he replied, almost roughly, "your love is the strangest and most eccentric I have ever met with."

"Why should I give you the dregs of a life," went on Keziah, "and bind you to a woman who can do nothing but fret, and make your life a burden to you? And," she said, with hot cheeks, "do you know what the people said? Yes, you do know: they said we went away together. They said the worst things of us."

"They know now it was quite untrue," was his reply.

"But they would believe all was true that they suspected, if I married you now," she rejoined, bitterly.

"Oh," said Elworthy, with a laugh that sounded forced and hard, "so it is the world's opinion you are thinking of, and not any feeling of mine. That being the case, I need trouble you no further. It cannot matter to you that I have wasted the best years of my life in a fruitless love. You care more about the world's opinion than anything I may suffer, and would punish the living to serve the dead even now. Well, Keziah, I am not sure you are not played out. I am compelled to suspect that your very womanhood is frozen up. Good-bye, Keziah. I will try to follow your example. It seems an easier process than I should have imagined."

Keziah could not speak. She could make no effort to rise as he left the room. In a moment she heard him leave the house.

Maud came down in a hurry now; though she had been an unusually long time in taking off her bonnet and putting Keziah's away.

"What is the meaning of this, Kizzy?" demanded Maud, flinging into the room, and looking at the white-faced girl almost angrily. "What have you done?"

Keziah began to cry and sob. Pitiable though she looked, Maud would neither pity nor comfort her. "I am sure you have done something foolish, or he would never have gone off like that. And I tell you what it is, Keziah, there is such a thing as wearing a man's patience out, though you don't seem to think it. I don't suppose he'll come back again. He'll believe you don't care anything about him."

"That's what he says," sobbed out Keziah.

"It's what he thinks, whether he says it or not," replied Maud, hotly. "You ought to have more sense, Keziah. I don't know that I ever felt so angry with you about anything. Whatever kind of a reason can you have for it? I can't imagine, I am sure. You go and throw your chance of happiness away, just as if it were nothing. If it were only yourself, perhaps you might have a right to do it. What right have you to tamper with his happiness? I tell you, Keziah, badly as you imagine you

served Thomas Hackbit, you were an angel to him compared with what you have been to James Elworthy. And yet Thomas Hackbit never deserved a tithe of your allegiance, while Elworthy—well, it doesn't often fall to a woman's lot to be loved as he has loved you."

"I've never known you so unkind to me," said Keziah, amid her sobs. "What would the world say, if I married him? Besides, I could never make him happy. You ought to know that."

"What I do know is, that you've never tried. But you don't seem at all to mind making him miserable. And fancy you talking about the world's opinion. There was a time, Keziah, when you would have laughed such an idea to scorn."

"I know that. But all you say about me only makes me more sure that I ought not to marry him."

"Well, you are very obstinate. I did think your trouble would have taught you more sense. If you can act in this way, I should not be surprised if you went and married somebody else, just to put yourself out of his reach; and if you did, I'd never speak to you again."

"How dare you talk to me so?" exclaimed Keziah, getting up from her seat, and drying her eyes. "All the rest you have said is true enough. But the last is an insult—nothing more nor less."

In the meantime, Elworthy had walked rapidly into Manchester, and gone straight to his hotel, where he ordered some wine, and asked for his bill and the time-table. There was a train he might easily catch back to Leamington. He lost no time. That evening, about half-past nine, Mrs. Beredith was startled by Elworthy's breaking in upon her in a wild and buoyant manner. She had never feared so much for him before.

"You've seen her?" asked Mrs. Beredith, taking hold of both his hands.

"Oh, yes, I have seen her," he answered. "Not Keziah, though; Mrs. Hackbit. And I've come to ask you a favour," he went on hurriedly.

She looked alarmed. What was he going to ask?

"There will never be anything between me and her now," he explained. "That is quite over. She has killed my love. I have no right to ask what I am going to ask. But you, who have let me call you mother now for a long time, will forgive me if I do wrong. I want you to let me ask Lucy to marry me."

Mrs. Beredith started. She had long known Lucy's secret regarding this man. Was her child to be made happy, then, after all?

But as she did not answer, Elworthy went on, with a fluency she had never noticed since the old days, when Keziah first came. "It is only a ruined sort of a life that I can offer her. But she is so gentle and so kind; she might take me. At least it can be no harm for me to ask her I would be good to her."

"My dear Rupert," Mrs. Beredith replied, very gravely, "this is not a question for me to decide. But I think you had better wait."

"Wait!" cried the young man, with a strange laugh. "I have had some good practice in waiting. It is no more waiting I will do. Where is Lucy? Is Miss Saltring with her?"

"No; Lucy is by herself, in the drawing-room."

Elworthy began to whistle an air, and lightly walked into the room—the very room where Keziah had laughed at him about his want of appreciation of jokes.

A little figure was seated near a table, in a neat brown dress; and she got up with evident pleasure as Elworthy came in. "Lucy," he said, breaking the ice immediately, "you won't be offended?" He had never called her Lucy before, and her heart beat fast. "Lucy, you know what a shattered life mine is, don't you? It's not worth offering to any woman. But"—here he took her hands, and looked at the gentle face—"Lucy, I must have some rest from this turmoil. I must end it some way; and if you refuse to take pity on me, I think I shall die."

He saw he had not made himself clear enough. "Lucy, will you be my wife, and try to make me forget? You are so good and so gentle: I believe you can do it, if anyone can."

"I both can and will," replied the girl, frankly; "for I have always loved you. I may tell it now."

Elworthy stayed to supper; and Miss Laura Saltring could not fail to be awake to the fact that something unusual had occurred. But she could not decide in her own mind whether Elworthy had gone mad, or was going to be married to Keziah immediately. She, however, kept silent, and trusted to her own power of observation to reveal something. She had become much more accommodating to Lucy and Mrs. Beredith since her father had thrown up his business, and all the property he had got by means of it. She had told Jubal that she would do anything rather than live at home under these changed conditions. And she had determined to keep her situation, which was so easy, until Jubal should

be able to marry her. Elworthy went home, and found Gerald Harwyn was out seeing a patient. So he sat down in the surgery and wrote the following letter :—

“DEAR MRS. HACKBIT,—I have taken the first step towards learning the lesson you set me, and am in a fair way to succeed well. Miss Beredith has promised to marry me. Your practical eye will recognise the womanly generosity she shows in taking the dregs of a cup another woman has drained. Well, all that is past. I trust the philosophy you possess in such a high degree may stand your friend as much as I might have done, had things been different. Remember me to Mrs. Towers, and thank her for her kindness. I would apologise for my rudeness in leaving her without a word. But no doubt you have explained ; and no doubt she is extremely proud to have so high-souled a woman for her friend, whose rigour of purity quite surpasses my feeble comprehension. I will content myself now with something less of Puritanism, and something more of kindly womanhood. A man wants neither a stone nor an angel.—I remain, yours truly,

“JAMES ELWORTHY.”

And having written the letter, he posted it immediately with his own hand.

He returned from the post, and moodily sat down in the surgery, and lit a cigar. At length the surgery was filled with smoke, so much so that Gerald Harwyn, opening the door at a late hour, exclaimed with a good deal of sharpness, “Hang it, what a cloud !”

A voice out of the cloud said, “All right, old fellow.”

Gerald, who was at first quite unable to see Elworthy through the smoke, was not a little startled to hear his voice.

“You back !” he exclaimed.

“Oh, yes, I am back,” Elworthy responded lightly, but with a grimness of manner that betokened something had gone wrong.

“I hope you’ve not had any trouble?” inquired young Harwyn sympathetically, closing the door and sitting down.

“Oh, dear no,” answered Elworthy, in the same short manner, “I have come out of the tempest into smooth water.”

Gerald knew better. His friend wouldn’t look like this, if all were well. “Look here, old fellow,” he said coaxingly, “why not tell me all about it ?”

“Haven’t I just told you ?”

"No, you haven't. You've seen Mrs. Hackbit, of course?"

"Oh, yes, I have seen her."

Harwyn concluded from this that perhaps Keziah had been unwilling to "fix the day," so he remarked, in what he meant to be a consolatory way, "Well, you see, we must have a little patience with women. They're odd creatures. My sister is, at any rate."

It was clear to Elworthy that young Harwyn would get the facts out of him sooner or later, so he made a clean breast of it, and told him all that had occurred. Gerald appeared very little concerned at the first part of the narration. It was when he was told of the engagement to Lucy that he started, and exclaimed—

"Well, Elworthy, you have acted like a fool this time. Things done in temper are always the acts of a madman, and have disastrous results. Had you let things alone, Maud would have piloted you through, I know she would. But why you should insult Miss Beredith by offering yourself to her under such circumstances, I don't know."

Elworthy puffed away, and allowed his friend to go on.

"I can't make it out, how it is people always give in just when they're going to win something, even though they've shown the courage of heroes up to that point."

"But, Harwyn," broke in his companion, in a voice full of suppressed trouble, "you don't mean to suggest that—you don't mean to imply that Kizzy"—his voice had a sob in it as he mentioned her name—"would have——"

"I mean to say this," rejoined Harwyn, hotly, "that had you not made such a confounded ass of yourself, you might have been married to her in a few weeks."

Elworthy heaved a deep sigh. "Ah!" he answered, "you've only heard my report of it. You didn't see her look nor hear her voice, or you wouldn't wonder, and you wouldn't blame me so."

"I tell you this," said Harwyn, excitedly, "that you are preparing to make chapter two blacker than chapter one. How dare you ask an honest woman to marry you when you are in love with another; and when you know in your heart, if you like to face the fact, that the reasons you assigned have nothing to do with it, nothing at all? You have used one woman's love for you, to stab another whom you love. Do you call that manly? I call it cowardly. Why should you punish Lucy because you are angry with Keziah?"

"In what way should I punish Lucy?"

"Are you blind, that you can't see a yard before you? Don't you know that you've made her a promise it's impossible for you to keep?"

"Do you think I shall back out of marrying her?"

"Oh, Elworthy," said Gerald, twisting and breaking up a quill pen in his vexation, "is the man who could follow another man's wife about as you did, the man to be faithful in the fullest sense to a woman he does not love, and has married to spite the woman he does love?"

"You've been a very true friend to me," was the reply, after a few seconds, in a low voice. "I know I deserve what you've been saying, every word of it. But, Harwyn, her manner drove me beside myself."

"I'll tell you why. You went unprepared."

"Unprepared!" exclaimed Elworthy. "How so? Unprepared! I like that. I had long enough to prepare in, at any rate."

"You allowed your love for her to so absorb you, that you did not give a proper consideration to her state of mind. Otherwise, you would have seen nothing to drive you away in what she said, or in her manner."

"Why didn't you tell me all this before?"

"What chance had I? You would never be spoken to."

"Hang it, but you should have made me. But as you seem to be Solomon, tell me what to do now."

"Doesn't your own sense suggest anything?"

"My sense! You've just said I had none."

"But you are more reasonable now."

"There's only one way, and that's impossible."

"I shall take you for an Irishman, if you talk like that. There is only one way, I say, and that is possible."

"What is it?"

"You must go to-morrow, and tell Lucy the whole truth. Not a part, mind, but the whole."

"And if I do that, what a cur I shall look; and I should forfeit her mother's friendship, which I value so highly."

"Ah, well, you'll have to put up with some of that. You can't expect to come off scot-free. Why should you, indeed?"

"And if I break off with Lucy," went on Elworthy, "Keziah will never have anything to do with me after the letter I have sent her."

"You've got yourself into a deuce of a mess, that I'll allow; and you'll have to go through many a smart before you get things to the point they were at when you met Keziah to-day."

"Well, I think I'll go to bed," said Elworthy ; and he went away with a slow and weary step.

When he was gone, young Harwyn sat down and wrote a long letter to his sister, in which he pleaded eloquently for his friend.

CHAPTER LIII.

DECISION AND INDECISION.

ON the Monday morning following, Elworthy was summoned to Stone Court ; but on his way back he planned to call at the Berediths'. He was quite resolved to follow Gerald Harwyn's advice, and tell Lucy the whole truth. The sun had been shining all the morning, and Elworthy thought more cheerfully of his position, as a man sometimes will when nature smiles, and he is not called upon to act immediately. No doubt Lucy would understand, he said to himself over and over again, as he rode along the pleasant lanes. Yes, Lucy would understand, and Mrs. Beredith would forgive him for a rash act that she herself had been opposed to. But as he became aware that his horse was bringing him rapidly into the actual presence of his difficulty, he became less complacent ; and in a cowardly manner—and who has not felt such cowardice as this at some time in his life?—wished earnestly that some patient or some messenger would confront him, and forcibly put off this visit.

However, no such luck befell him, if luck it might be termed ; and he found himself drawing rein in front of Mrs. Beredith's house, with its prettily draped windows. He was painfully conscious of his heart thumping as he dismounted and threw his reins over the palings. He saw one of the upstairs curtains move, and for the moment he almost thought that, if he looked, he should see the small head with the short black curls shining out on him as of old.

He rang the bell. Yes : Miss Beredith was at home ; so was Miss Saltring. Mrs. Beredith was out, shopping. This information gave him relief. For the moment he thought it was a means of escape. He might justifiably put off calling if Mrs. Beredith were from home.

While he was thinking about it, Mrs. Beredith herself appeared. It was clear there was not this escape for him.

She smiled pleasantly, and remarked on the fineness of the weather, and asked Rupert's opinion about hiring a brougham and driving to

Kenilworth. "You see, we may not get such a fine day again for a long while at this time of the year," she said, in the pretty, rippling, contented tone which was her characteristic.

She became aware he was not noticing what she was saying. Having entered the drawing-room, Elworthy strode to the fireplace, put his foot on the shining steel of the fender, and looked at his reflection in the mirror on the mantelpiece. He saw his features were fixed and strained: he began to feel angry with Mrs. Beredith for allowing him to take this fatal step. "She has known my heart all along," he thought. "She ought to have known this would never do." Then he remembered that she had advised him not to take the step.

As for Mrs. Beredith, she was thinking that he was well rid of Keziah. Keziah had changed. It might be better, after all, that he should marry Lucy. He would feel strange at first, of course. That was natural. But afterwards, Lucy would be so good and so kind—as he himself had said—that he would find rest; and he could not help growing to love so good and gentle a creature as Lucy, in time.

She did not know how much her own love for Lucy entered into all this, and influenced her way of looking at the case. So seeing his mood, she went out to send her daughter to him. Elworthy instinctively knew what she would do, and dreaded the coming moment. He heard a creaking of the door, and did not look round. But he saw in the mirror the reflection of a shy figure dressed in brown, with a pretty flush on the cheeks, coming into the room. He turned round; how could he do otherwise?

The shy figure glided towards him, and put out two little hands, with snowy white frills round the wrists, confidently and calmly, while she looked at him with glad eyes, and lips quivering with a smile. He took the hands in his; that was not to be avoided. And now came his task. He knew his first word ought to convey something of his meaning, and he shrank from uttering the word that should cause the withdrawal of the little hands, and drive away that flickering smile. All that morning he had tried to plan something to say to her; but now he could recollect nothing he had thought of saying. After a moment or two's silence, during which he had still held the little hands, though loosely and without emotion such as the touch of Keziah's dress brushing past him would have excited, he stammered out—

"You have made a bad bargain, Lucy—in taking me, I mean. It has not gone far. Don't you think you had better reconsider it?"

He was inwardly cursing himself for the roundabout method he was adopting, and he saw in a moment by her face that his intention had miscarried. The poor girl only interpreted his words according to her love for him, and not at all in the way he had meant.

"It is not a bad bargain if I do not think it one," Lucy said. "It cannot be a bad bargain that makes me so happy."

He felt her words as so many chains thrown about him ; and though a woman's hand was binding him, he felt himself powerless. How could he have the inhumanity to break out after these words, and say "You have mistaken what I mean. I mean I wish myself out of the bargain !" Right or wrong, be the consequences what they might be, it was morally impossible for him to say what he had to say, then. He must find out some other plan.

He dropped her hands now, and said to her, in a voice that sounded choked, "I have a patient to see now, Lucy, and must go." She made no remonstrance at his cutting the interview so short. She felt no distrust of him. She felt like her mother did ; it was but natural he should be just a little strange, at first. So she opened the door for him ; and when he went away without kissing her, felt no resentment. She was too happy for that, quite too happy.

When he had ridden away, Mrs. Beredith said, smiling affectionately on her daughter, "How good of him to come in this morning, Lucy ! We couldn't have expected that, you know. He has done it to show how much in earnest he is. You could not have been hurt, Lucy, if he had not come for two or three days. You must not make severe demands upon him, you know, Lucy. After all that has happened, he can't be just like another man."

"Oh, no," replied Lucy, shaking her head, with a faint smile, "he can never be like another man. It is not me you need tell that to."

Laura Saltring had come into the room, and Mrs. Beredith said to her, "So our Lucy will, perhaps, be married before you, Laura, after all."

"She will have to be quick about it, then," retorted Laura, pertly.

Mrs. Beredith, on hearing this, was startled into feeling some interest in another subject than her daughter's engagement.

"Then it can't be young Rimmon you are going to marry," she remarked, rather sharply.

Laura laughed lightly. "And why should it not be ?" she asked.

"Because he's a mere boy," returned Mrs. Beredith, with no smile on her face now ; "and because he has no position."

This annoyed Laura, who could have told more than she chose to tell. So she said spitefully, "I don't see why anyone need trouble about me and my marriage. Jubal Rimmon is the property of no other woman, I suspect."

Lucy and her mother both winced under this remark. They understood it.

"And do you think," broke out Mrs. Beredith, with little discretion, "that Lucy is going to marry the property of another woman?"

"If she's going to marry Dr. Elworthy, I certainly think so," said Laura.

"That's a very unkind remark," said Lucy, not showing much force, it must be owned. "You ought to know better than that, and you do know better."

"Well, how long has he ceased to be the property of Mrs. Hackbit, then?"

Neither lady could speak. Could they say, since yesterday?

"I know very well that he went to see her the other day. At any rate he went to Manchester; and he was seen by some one I know, at Manchester, and what other purpose could he have in going there?"

"He did go. I know all about it," said Mrs. Beredith, defending her daughter's position with some warmth. "And all connection was broken off between them."

"I wonder he went over to do that," replied Laura; "he might have written it."

"You seem to know a great deal about it," said Mrs. Beredith, affecting a sneer. "Perhaps you can tell us what we ought to have done."

"Well," said Laura, "since you ask me, I think you might have waited to see whether Dr. Elworthy's purpose was fixed, or, which is far the most likely, whether he had merely acted under vexation that Keziah wouldn't marry him to-morrow. In that case, you may depend he didn't mean to be accepted."

Lucy looked appealingly at her mother, and began to cry.

"Miss Saltring," said Mrs. Beredith, severely, "we have borne a good deal from you since you have been with us, in one way or another; but you have gone a little too far this time."

Poor Mrs. Beredith; she did not know how much of the self-regarding human element was entering into what she was saying, and that she was most of all angry because of the truth of Laura's remarks.

"I am very sorry to do it," went on Mrs. Beredith, "but I must

request you to go home to your father, as soon as may be ; and I will communicate with him."

Now this was a very real shock to Laura, who had never before seen such a result follow her plain speaking. Laura had credited Mrs. Beredith with the faculty, learnt in trade, of not getting vexed with people, whatever the provocation might be; so she started at Mrs. Beredith's white face, and wondered if she had heard aright. There was a dead silence for a moment, and then Lucy, in tears, implored her mother not to send Laura away.

Laura stood quite unmoved ; she did not care about seeing the persecuted praying for their persecutors ; it put the persecutors into such a ridiculous position. So she chose to get into a passion ; and flinging a highly sarcastic look at Lucy, she said—

"You are addressing your petition to the wrong quarter. 'Tis I you should beg to stay if you want to influence the matter at all. But your ignorance is of no consequence. If you begged me a hundred times, I would not stop ; though I have no doubt when you reflect on it, you'd much prefer my stopping, for you've no nice reason to assign for my hasty departure." So, icily smiling, she quitted the apartment, and was soon heard in the room above, occupied about her packing.

CHAPTER LIV.

MADELINE'S STORY.

"WELL," said Miss Saltring, marching into her father's dining-room on her arrival from Leamington, "you appear to be pretty jolly on the whole." So saying, she sat down and began to unloose her things, and requested that a servant might come and take her boots off.

"I will do it," said Mrs. Saltring. "You see we have only one servant now."

"What a very pleasant state of affairs !" said Laura. "Thank Heaven, I shan't have to endure it long."

Her relatives were wondering how long they should have to endure Laura.

"Where has she gone?" asked Laura, looking at no one in particular.

"If you mean Madeline," responded Mr. Saltring, "she is not at home at present ; and I don't think she would have come home and not come to kiss any of us, like you."

"The world is false," said Laura; "and I'm no worse than other people, for not pretending more than I feel. I must say, however, it's an agreeable surprise not to find you all tearing your hair after the letter you must have received from my benefactress, as you style Mrs. Beredith."

"Come, get some tea," put in the mother. "I can't bear discussions; they are no good in themselves, and never lead to any, I think."

"Pretty good table, on the whole," remarked Laura. "I thought you were all living on porridge, perhaps; but I find it much as usual."

Laura did not know that the little extras had been procured because she was coming home, that she might not feel the change too keenly.

"And so you are an estate-agent now, are you, papa? What a droll thing!"

"I am two or three things," replied Mr. Saltring. "And I don't find it at all droll. It goes along very well indeed. I shall make something by my grapes, and vegetables, and fruit generally, next summer, I hope. We shall pull along, I know," he went on, addressing his wife; "shan't we, mother?"

"Well, I've not come to be a burden and a drawback, I know," said Laura. "I shan't be here long. . . . You said just now something about Miss Madeline being from home. Where is that?"

"Here, of course," said Mr. Saltring, becoming irritated.

"I must say, I wonder at it," replied Laura. "No girl with a grain of right feeling would stay and eat at your table now, when you are beginning the world again."

"Why do you judge without your book?" rejoined Mr. Saltring, hotly. "You would have known all about it, if you had not objected to our giving you any details in our letters. Madeline, God bless her, could have left us, had she wished it, for a much better home; but she chose rather to stand by our fallen fortunes, and has added to our income very considerably by teaching singing and music. She never looks dull now, since we've had something to make us look dull sometimes; but she cheers us all, and makes everything go right; and she helps mother with the children, now we've only one maid; and she stitches and mends. I never saw a girl like her."

Mrs. Saltring was looking all the time at Laura, giving confirmatory nods at intervals while her husband was speaking.

The door being pushed open at this moment, a very lovely boy of about five years came timidly in, and looked shyly at the stranger.

"Come, Bertie," said Mrs. Saltring.

He went to her, but kept his eyes all the time on the stranger.

"So that's the child they saddled you with," said Laura, "is it? I should think Keziah might have had him back now."

Once more you are at fault, Laura," replied her father. "Keziah would have gladly had him back, but we would not give him up, he had grown so dear to us all. Madeline would have broken her heart, I believe."

"Why, the child's the very image of her," said Laura, staring at him.

"We have all been struck by the likeness," said Mr. Saltring.

"But have drawn no conclusion, I daresay?" said Laura.

"There is no conclusion to draw," Mr. Saltring asserted decidedly, getting up from the table and walking out of the room.

Laura, however, smiled a good deal to herself as she finished her tea, and annoyed her mother not a little by it.

Mr. Saltring thought, in a despairing way, "What have I done to have such a daughter?" He would doubtless have gone on thinking sadly for some time, had not a caller interrupted him; it was Mr. Rockingham.

That gentleman had so serious a look upon his face, that Mr. Saltring was certain it was no ordinary business that had brought him.

"I hope you have a little time to spare," the vicar began; "for mine will be a long story if I am to make myself plain. It's a most extraordinary thing I've come about, and a very painful one. It is quite private and personal; and I show my great confidence in you in coming to you as I do now, to tell you what many of my most intimate friends have never heard me mention."

"Never fear, sir," was the reply. And now the two sat down: they had been standing until this moment. The clergyman's face was very pale. He tried to begin once, and had to stop. Then, making a great effort, he said—

"I had a dear sister once, Saltring." Mr. Saltring's interest immediately showed itself in his face. "She was like nobody in the family, and she didn't get on quite well with her mother and the rest of them. So they all found it convenient for her to go and study music in Germany; for she had a great talent for music, and a wonderful voice. Well," said the clergyman, with a pause, "she never came back."

"She died?" put in Mr. Saltring, interrogatively.

"No," said the clergyman, scarcely above a whisper, "it was worse than that. She eloped. It was a bad man she went away with. And

though so many years have passed, I have been making an endless and fruitless search for her. So that is why I have travelled so much, as everyone else has believed, for my own pleasure. There is not a land I have not visited, nor a town, where it was possible she might be yet living, or where I might find her grave, if she were gone."

Mr. Saltring had taken the clergyman by the hand, and was gripping it in a manner that would have testified to his sympathy if he had uttered no word. "But have you found no one at all to help you in your search?" he asked.

"Oh, no," replied Mr. Rockingham, with a wan smile that looked so very dreary that it went right to the heart of his friend. "There is a new point of interest, however, in the story, perhaps the most important of all, now. There is someone who may be really the right one to search for her with me, who may have a claim to do so. I believe I have found her child."

"Where?" asked Mr. Saltring, with breathless interest.

"My good friend," said the clergyman, laying both his hands on Mr. Saltring's shoulders, "in your house."

Relieved of his secret, Mr. Rockingham rushed on, in a manner quite foreign to his usual method of talking.

"If it is not true, if I am labouring under a delusion, why is she the living image of her? Why does she sing *her* songs, in just *her* tone? Why has she got just her trick of closing her eyes slowly, and darting them open, till you feel it like a spell? I never saw but one girl do like that, just as she does it. Her eyelids droop till she appears half-dreaming, and then suddenly lift themselves all fire upon you."

Mr. Saltring, hearing this described, applied it to yet another. This was a trick of little Bertram's, too. When first he had come to them, they had been all individually struck by the great size of his eyes, compared with what they at first thought them; and this was all through his habit of drooping his eyelids, unless when speaking or being spoken to.

"I tell you," went on Mr. Rockingham, "she's as like her as two human beings can be, to her very finger-tips, which I have watched on the piano, to the very shape of her ear, which is the neatest I ever saw. She has my sister's gliding walk."

Mr. Saltring, was so much astounded by all this, that he could think of nothing to say.

"I want to ask you, can you throw any light, Saltring? Where does she come from? She has surely told you."

"I have never asked her," replied Mr. Saltring huskily. "We none of us have. It would be like not trusting her."

"Then you must ask her for my sake, now you know about this."

"It is my duty, and I will, though it goes against the grain to press the girl for confidence she has withheld ; but if it is true, it must be best for her that you should know it ; and she is very fond of you."

"Will you ask her where she got the little prayer-book she uses? I have tried to get it into my hands when she has called after service at the Vicarage ; but she always holds it tightly. She never puts it down to look at anything."

"I will do all I can," replied Mr. Saltring.

And the two men, so different in station, clasped hands in a strong and common sympathy which spoke them brothers in the great human family.

Mr. Saltring took care that Laura should not meet Madeline on her return, which was rather later than usual that evening ; but Laura saw her come, heard her mother go to meet her, and the two went together immediately into the little sitting-room upstairs, which was the sanctum of the establishment.

It was the case of Joseph's brethren over again. No matter what Madeline did, Laura hated her yet the more for it. She hated her now for being in her mother's confidence in this manner, and for being of use to that mother. She was not going to trouble her head, she said to herself, about Madeline, who had been picked up out of the streets. She would make as speedy arrangements as possible to reign in a house of her own, and with this view she sat down and wrote to Jubal, with what result we shall learn later on.

She would have laid down her pen, and gone and listened, if she had had any idea that a conversation of such import was taking place in the little sitting-room. But fortunately workers of evil have not their *genii* in real life to inform them of everything at the right moment.

"My dear Madeline," Mrs. Saltring was saying, "you know me too well to doubt my love for you now ; and if I ask you any questions that may look like mistrust of you, I beg of you not to take it in that way. I am sure no motive such as curiosity or mistrust could have ever given me the courage to ask you what I am going to ask. Indeed, it is harder for me than you can think."

"I know, I know what you are going to ask me," replied Madeline, covering her face with her hands. "Don't. I will tell you without. I

knew it would come to this. But I was so loth to give up my home, where I have been so happy ; and when I have told you, I must go."

"How can you speak so, Madeline, my child?" said Mrs. Saltring, beginning to cry ; "just as if anything, no matter what, could induce us to let you go, unless to a better home."

"Oh," responded Madeline, "you good, good people always say these words, that kind of word ; but it feels all different when you have heard the truth, when you have to get used to it, and think about it every day after. It does kill love ; it does," she said passionately. "But I knew it must come. I could expect nothing else. How should I ? I have been too, too fortunate in having had this brief respite."

"Madeline," said Mrs. Saltring, "the love we feel for you cannot die, cannot change. Oh, that I could burn these words into your heart till you could never forget them."

"I believe you mean them," returned Madeline ; "of course I do. But I must tell you now, whatever comes of it. You have a right to ask me. I wouldn't have believed you could have kept me in the house so long without asking me. It is that you are not the least bit like the world, you and Mr. Saltring. Where shall I begin ?" she cried, shutting her little hands tightly, and looking away from her friend.

"Shall I help you to begin?" asked Mrs. Saltring, gently.

"Ah, if you could," replied the girl ; "but how can you ?"

"Whose is the little prayer-book you use at Church ?"

The girl started. "My mother's," she said ; "my poor mother's."

"And who was your mother, my poor child ?"

"I don't know," said Madeline. "She would never let me know that. She said she couldn't have one of the oldest names in England dragged in the dirt ; that is all I know."

This seemed so conclusive to Mrs. Saltring's mind, that but for the strong warnings given her by her husband, she would have blurted out all that Mr. Rockingham had revealed. Madeline drew the little prayer-book out of her pocket, and her tears rained down on its cover. "She gave it to me," said Madeline, "when she bade me go away, 'go away and starve,' that's what she said."

"How could she have been so cruel ?"

"Cruel !" said Madeline, flashing her great eyes suddenly on Mrs. Saltring. "She cruel ! It is because you never knew her, you say that. She me told to starve rather than live the life that lay before me

where I was—that was all; that was not cruel. It was after her husband had left her.”

“She was married, then?” Mrs. Saltring asked.

“Oh, yes, she was married to my father.”

“Did she ever tell you how she met him?”

“No,” said the girl wearily.

“Then what do you remember first?”

“I remember my mother and father quarrelling when they came home from the concert hall. That was when I was quite little.”

“What did they quarrel about?” Mrs. Saltring inquired, hoping to get some clue.

“Oh, different things; about other women, and other men, and about father’s going to America, and spending all the profits; and then he went to America again, and never came back. Then poor mamma was taken up by the proprietor of the concert hall, and he pretended to marry her; but of course he couldn’t marry her, when we didn’t know whether her husband was dead or not. I was brought out there afterwards. Then my new father, as he made me call him, used to drink and gamble; and he got into debt, and all our things were sold; and a young medical student lent him some money. . . .” Here her voice faltered a good deal; but she went desperately on. “He was there on a holiday.”

“Where was it, my dear?”

“At Baden, that was. He seemed to have plenty of money; and he said if he could marry me, he would set father on his feet. Father raved and insisted, in spite of my youth; and I couldn’t see poor mamma so miserable: how could I? And I thought if I married him, it would at least make it better for her; so I married him. And it was not until after my baby was born that I found out it had all been a deception: I had not been married at all, and my father knew it at the time. They took my baby away; I don’t know what was done with it. I have been trying to find out ever since; God knows I would not forsake it. Then I tried to go on as I had done before: but fresh difficulties arose; and this man I had to call father laid such a plan before me for restoring his fortunes that my poor mother arranged my flight.”

“Oh, how could she send you away, to what might be worse?” Mrs. Saltring exclaimed.

“You do not understand,” was Madeline’s reply; “she was powerless to protect me; she knew that, and I knew it. It was but a choice of

evils. She gave me all the money she had, and this little prayer-book you asked me about."

And the girl, having told her story, laid her head on Mrs. Saltring's shoulder, and wept aloud. The little prayer-book fell from her lap, and the cover opened; and in it was plainly legible, "O. R., a gift from her brother."

CHAPTER LV

KINSFOLK.

AT eleven o'clock the same evening, when Mr. Saltring entered the vicar's study, he found him at his table, with his books spread out, and his shaded reading-lamp lighting the table only.

The vicar looked up eagerly as Mr. Saltring entered.

"Look," he said, unshading his lamp, "let me read in your face whether I have been astray, and have all to go through over again, in a new search."

"We cannot be certain," was the reply, "all in a moment; we could hardly expect that." The vicar's face clouded. "But I am as near sure as any man can be without positive proof." He then proceeded to repeat Madeline's story, word for word as Mrs. Saltring had told it to him.

"Now, tell me this," said Mr. Rockingham, when he had heard it all with an overwhelming eagerness in his face. "Has she any idea why she was asked these questions?"

"Not the least in the world. And now this is all settled so far, what shall I do next?"

"It is I who shall do what is done next. You will let me see her to-morrow, if I call?"

"She will be going out to give a lesson rather early, and I fear it would be almost useless to try and persuade her not to be punctual at an appointment."

"Ah, I am like a young man," said the clergyman; "I cannot curb my impatience. Where is she giving her lesson to-morrow morning?"

"At Major Perry's."

"Then I will walk over there with her. Will you tell her that?"

The next morning saw Madeline and the clergyman walking briskly along a country road. Madeline was unusually quiet after her confession of the night before. She could not help wondering what this clergyman,

who made so much of her, would think if he knew the truth. He was quiet, too, but from another reason. It is easy in privacy to plan a conversation, but quite another thing to put the plan into action when the time comes. The one who has imagined and planned the scene may act his part correctly, but how is the other actor to act the part written for him, if he has never seen it?

"My dear," began the clergyman gently, when they had entered a little wood, "I want you to look at this portrait, and tell me if you ever saw anyone like it." And he took from his pocket, with a trembling hand a portrait painted on ivory, of a very lovely girl.

She blushed slightly as she looked at it, and her first thought was, how like it was to the reflection that greeted her every morning at her mirror. Then her face turned very white as she looked further, and her lips parted, and she cried with a terror-stricken look, "She's got that locket on!"

Mr. Rockingham now took her hands, clasped together as they were, in one of his own. "My dear child," he said, "tell me what locket you mean."

"Oh, I can't, I can't," she cried, trying to release her hands, "it cannot matter to you in any way. You have no right to question me, indeed you haven't," she said piteously.

"I may have more right to question you than anyone you have seen for a very long time," he replied sadly, for he had imagined her taking it in quite a different way, when he had thought out the scene in his study beforehand. "Look, I will begin to trust you. Shall I tell you whose portrait that is?"

She had her eyes now wide open, fixed on a last year's bird's nest, in one of the bushes near by, and she did not see how he trembled, or how pale he was.

"Madeline, she was my sister; she was *my* sister. Now answer me, have I no right at all to ask you any question?"

She still stared at the bird's nest, with that frozen look in her face, and did not answer.

"Do you understand me?" he said. "That portrait is the portrait of my sister, for whom I have been searching many, many years, of bitter hopeless search."

She suddenly brought her great eyes away from the bird's nest, and on to his face, unclasped her hands, and placed them on her head, in a bewildered fashion.

"I don't think I quite understand," she said, brokenly. "I can't collect myself. Let me think." And she turned her eyes once more towards the deserted nest ; and he let her remain in silence as she would. Then he said, ever so gently, after some moments had passed, "Did you ever see the inside of a locket like that in the picture?"

"Yes," responded the girl, in a far-away voice, as if in a dream. "She always wore it."

"Her brother's likeness was in it." He gave a great sob. "Oh, my child," he said, "look at me. Am I nothing like that portrait?"

She shook her head slowly from side to side. "No, nothing at all like him. He was—handsome," she said, with a blush.

"Ah," he returned, with a strange laugh, "and I am not ; that is what you mean. Well, it is quite true ; I know that. My hair was black and curly once, and my face had not all these furrows. Oh, time and trouble change everything." And he thought with a pang, that time and trouble might have so changed her that he might have passed his sister again and again and never have known it.

The girl began to grow less bewildered. "My mother's brother," she said, "was called Philip ; I know that." There had been no explanation between them, that that likeness resembled the girl's mother. It had been taken for granted somehow.

"Should you know your mother's writing?"

"Oh, yes, quite well ; it was like no one else's."

"I know that." He drew from his pocket a packet of old letters. She uttered a little cry. There was no doubt about it. It was, indeed, her mother's writing. She recognized it before the packet was in her hand, and while the writing was upside down before her. She trembled all over like an aspen, and waited for him to say something.

"O my darling," he said, "will you not go and look for her with me?"

A sudden pain seized her. What would this brother think if he found her as she was, if indeed she still lived? What would he think of her if he knew her story? And a hundred things flashed into her mind that her mother had said to her about the pride of the family to which she belonged, and the unsullied names they had all borne for so long.

"Oh!" she said, in an accent of fear, "I must not do it. It would kill her, even if she still lives. She often said she was dead to you, to you all. Once," cried the girl, in a sudden access of energy, "she said she saw you ; it was Baden. She was singing, and she said she saw you

in the audience, and she had to be carried out. Were you there then, in ——?”

The clergyman leaned against a tree for support. “I was there, and I remember it well. But that could not have been . . . she. O God, it is too cruel. I will find her,” he cried. “Go with me to Baden. Let us start to-morrow.”

The girl looked with horror in her face. “They may have gone from there : they must have gone,” she said. “My mother always said she should take her opportunity of going to search for her husband, too, and live honestly, if possible.”

He winced at her words. They became conscious, too, that somebody was coming towards them through the wood, lightly singing an air from an opera. The clergyman was angry at the interruption ; nothing more. But the girl, her eyes strained larger than ever, stared at the approaching figure with an accumulated horror in her face, not to be described in words ; then, without turning her eyes away, she flung herself into the arms of her new-found protector, and pointed with a white, trembling finger. The figure was getting very near now, and stopped singing, to laugh lightly, and to remark, “So Monsieur the priest is having his little pastime,” and was about to pass on, when he caught sight of Madeline.

“O Jupiter,” he cried, “and ten thousand thunders, here is the other of them. *Oh Ciel*, this is too embarrassing, quite too embarrassing indeed.” He returned to his old manner, and, smiling, said to the shrinking girl, “Why did you not look for me and find me, too? I would have been fond of you, for you are young and beautiful, and would fill my hall. And your mother is no longer young, and no longer pretty. Monsieur the priest, I beg your pardon,” he said, raising his hat, “this is my daughter. I forgive you the enjoyment you may have had to her expense. Come,” he said, extending his hand, “it is a most fortunate circumstance now.”

“Don’t come near her,” cried the clergyman, clenching his fist. “You will have to give proof you are her father, before I shall let her approach you. Who are you, and what is your name? Your name is villain, whatever your other name is.”

The stranger drew from his pocket, first a cigarette case, and then a card case, upon which was printed :—

Eugène Pelbois.

Mr. Rockingham paled still more. It was the name he knew too well as that of his sister’s husband.

"What have you done with my sister?" he cried out, seizing the foreigner somewhere between his cravat, collar, and shirt.

"My dear sir," was the conjurer's reply, "can you not address me without disarranging so much my cravat? Which of them is your sister? I beg your pardon."

"This girl's mother, you fiend in human form. By heaven, had I another coat on, I'd thrash you within an inch of your life, you cur. Where is my sister, I say?"

"Are you the amiable brother for whom she weeps, then?" he inquired aggravatingly.

"Where is she?" hissed the clergyman, looking dangerously at him. "Take me to her."

"Well, I do not object," returned the Frenchman, "seeing that Mademoiselle accompanies us."

"Madeline shall never go with you."

"There is a law in England," said the foreigner, smiling.

"No law shall ever part this girl from me, unless she wishes it. Try it. Do what you can."

"Under these charming circumstances, I do not think I will take you to the place where Madame your sister is, probably weeping."

"Hold," said the parson. "Don't try that. I shall never let you out of my sight again till I have found her. I will follow you night and day."

"How very droll," replied Pelbois, "to see a priest turned into a bull dog, as my most agreeable friend, Winterfold, does say; a university expression, I believe."

Madeline all this time was leaning heavily on her uncle's arm, her eyes staring and her lips parted. "Don't fear, dearest," he said to her encouragingly.

"Are you going to be reasonable," he said to the foreigner, "and take us at once to where my sister is?"

"That cannot be done in five minutes, even by conjuring," replied he, still smiling. "She is in Manchester, where I have taken a hall, it is some weeks."

"What were you doing here?" asked Mr. Rockingham, a new thought striking him.

"Well, I have come," said Monsieur, blandly, "to claim a small remittance that did not arrive, in its usual way, of someone in this neighbourhood."

"Who is it?"

"In all respect, I must decline to tell you, though it would be my wish to gratify so amiable a brother-in-law."

"Call me that again, and I'll knock you down."

Monsieur Pelbois, who made a practice of succeeding rather by policy than by courage, cunning rather than manliness, was considerably cowed by these words and the look that accompanied them. He dropped his ironical tone entirely, and expressed himself quite willing to accompany them, then and there, to the station.

The clergyman was silent a moment or two, meditating what to do. "Yes," he said at length, "we will go now straight to the station, as you suggest."

It was no moment for Madeline to remember the singing lesson she had been going to give; she never once thought of it. All her pent-up love and longing for her mother welled up within her. She was ready to go at once, and strong to go.

CHAPTER LVI.

DEATH-BRINGING JOY.

THE United Arts Hotel, Manchester, was next door to the Folly Theatre, and was patronised greatly by theatrical personages. It was there that the Springwoods were usually entertained by their friends; in fact, they almost lived at the United Arts during their season. On the other side of the hotel was the Folly Music and Entertainment Hall, which had been taken by Monsieur Pelbois for a time; and the front of which was plentifully decorated with coloured placards, depicting this able conjurer's miraculous performance.

At about three o'clock in the afternoon referred to in the last chapter, a cab stopped in front of the United Arts, where several young gentlemen, among whom was Jubal Rimmon, stood lounging about the door. Jubal was not the only member of the party who started with surprise on seeing Mr. Rockingham alight. Winterfold, who was of the party, appeared to be much struck, and pulling Denleigh by the sleeve, he whispered, "Deuce take it if that isn't Rockingham."

"Some one you know, then?" said Denleigh.

"I should rather think so," was the reply. "Comes to our house far too often. I vote we make tracks instantly. He'll be coming and speaking to us."

They would probably have carried this suggestion into action, had not young Springwood, who was also of the party, exclaimed, "By Jove!" in such a tone that there was nothing possible but to stand still and stare.

Mr. Rockingham was in the act of helping Madeline out of the cab. No wonder Springwood exclaimed. The waxen face, lit by its great dazzling eyes, and surrounded by a halo of gold, would have made anybody stop and stare.

"Oh," broke in Winterfold, "fancy seeing such a creature as that coming out of an ordinary cab! By Jove, though, she beats those other two, doesn't she?" By "the other two," we may presume Maud and Keziah were meant.

It was now Springwood's turn to exclaim, for Monsieur Pelbois next tripped lightly from the cab. "By ——," he said, "if she's going to join his company, they'll spoil our takings."

These young gentlemen moved on one side as the party of three entered the hotel, and then closed in once more, following them with their eyes. When they had mounted the staircase, and were no longer visible, Springwood said in a loud tone of voice, which was his usual one, "I never saw a piece of flesh like that before; and not made-up a whit, I'll swear. Let my dad set eyes on her, he'll bribe her over to our company. All the rest of our girls might go to the deuce. I tell you," he remarked solemnly, "I wouldn't have believed there could be such a girl. She looks as well close to as the make-ups do at a distance. What an oval her face is! And did you ever see such lips? I dare bet any of you a hundred pounds she has a fine set of teeth, too. I dare swear she isn't pinched in or padded a bit."

But while this player of low comedy was discussing Madeline's market value as a stage-article, he did not appear conscious that none of the others were attending to what he said. They were in earnest conversation themselves, and not about the girl, for a wonder. The comedian, when he had stopped talking, listened to them.

"For my part, I don't care a ——," said Jubal. "There's nobody he can tell that matters, to me."

"All very well," replied Winterfold, "but how about me? If he goes to our house, and tells my father he's seen me here, what a row they'll be! This place is known all over the world as a bad one, and I tell you I don't think I should go back home if I thought Rockingham would split; and he's sure to."

"He's here himself, at any rate," said Denleigh, winking. "He'd

have to tell that too. Strikes me he'll be only too glad to keep dark, on his own account, and is inwardly cursing you for having seen him."

"Really, now," said Winterfold, beginning to relax the severity of his countenance, "I shouldn't have thought he was that sort. I never thought of that."

"Oh, those parsons are sly dogs," observed Springwood, breaking in on the conversation. "We know that. There are more parsons hanging about our green-rooms than I could count up in a minute."

"Wonder what the girl's going to do," chimed in Jubal.

"She'll be a mesmerist or a somnambulist, or a thought-reader, or something of that sort, you'll see," said Springwood. "Oh, what a setting her head had on its shoulders! I never saw anything like it. She's quite thrown away on that low music hall."

"You're in a deuced hurry to take it all for certain," said Jubal. "Supposing she don't belong to Pelbois at all. She may belong to Mr. Rockingham."

A showy young woman joined the party at this moment, and proved the friendly relations she was on by pulling Winterfold's hair, and asking him if he were up to snuff: whereupon she was told by Mr. Springwood to bag her head, as some real beauty had passed that way not a minute before. The young lady pricked up her ears with evident interest, and requested to be informed who it was. She was told it was nobody she knew, or would ever know.

"Look here," observed Jubal; "you clear out. There's a gentleman that knows me gone in there."

"Perhaps he'll tell your mother," suggested the syren, making a grimace at Jubal.

Jubal's face clouded for a moment. What would his mother think if she knew the life he was leading?

The young lady showed no disposition to move on, however, and requested to be informed which of them was going to treat her to a tongue-loosener, by which epithet she indicated a glass of brandy. All of them expressed themselves willing, if she would be off! She chose to take it from them all.

They had been standing on some steps, and as she passed down them, chinking her money in her hand, she showed a very tiny foot. "Put it under your skirts," cried Springwood contemptuously. "*We've* seen a foot just now; and it hadn't got a heel a mile high stuck in the middle of the sole either, to make it look small."

The girl answered by a laugh and a grimace, and was gone.

"Look here," observed Denleigh. "That girl ought not to be allowed to be here."

"Which girl?"

"The one with the yellow hair," he replied, indicating the direction Madeline had taken. "It's a beastly shame for a girl like that to be brought here."

"You'd better go and marry her, and rescue her," suggested Springwood. "That would show you mean what you say. She ought not to belong to that Pelbois, I'll own; but if she joined our company, she's just the girl to raise the whole standard of the stage. What a Desdemona she'd make!"

"To your Othello, no doubt," sneered Winterfold.

"And why not?" retorted Springwood, hotly.

"Well, really," said Jubal, "the conversation has taken a curious turn, considering she may not be able to act at all; and, Springwood—well—there isn't much likeness between Bluebeard and Othello; you do the one too well to do the other."

"Great actors can take all parts," said Springwood, in a theatrical tone.

"Together?" inquired Winterfold. "You'd better do Othello *and* Desdemona."

Springwood was about to make an angry retort, when Denleigh interrupted. "Don't get his temper up. Unaccredited genius is apt to be irritable. What a paragraph Scratch has lost by not being here!"

In the meantime the three who had given rise to this discussion had gone into Monsieur Pelbois' apartments, which were handsome enough. It had been arranged during the journey that the foreigner should prepare his wife to receive her visitors, in order to avoid shock. He, however, insisted on placing wine and biscuits on his drawing-room table for his visitors, before entering his wife's apartment, and this in spite of their repeated assertions that they could take nothing.

It seemed an age that Pelbois was absent. The room he had entered was next to the one they were in; and the two stood together hand in hand, and vibrated in sympathy, as the tones of a voice familiar to both of them fell on their ears. There was an added something, too, in it, which neither of them could have described. It was that voice with a difference. It had been suggested that Madeline should go first and see her mother, and that she should break the

news of her brother's being there to her. Therefore, they were utterly unprepared for the wan apparition that now appeared in the doorway without warning, and framed itself there, looking, looking, not at Madeline, but at her brother ; while her husband, standing behind her, kept making despairing signs to Mr. Rockingham and Madeline, setting forth as plainly as signs could, his utter inability to have prevented this. But as the gentle sister of former years stood there looking, every change in the dear face was burnt into her brother's heart and memory. Painful as it was to look, he did not remove his eyes from her. Her ghastliness showed itself the more for the paint on her face ; and even the very attempts towards frustrating the effects of time and sorrow, had a terrible pathos in them for the brother who had loved her through all these years.

For a long time, as it appeared, they stood so, neither advancing, neither speaking. It was not until the figure in the doorway began to sway gently, that the clergyman seemed to gain the power of moving. A single movement brought him to her side. His arms were round her, clutching her, gloating over her. A new life seemed to rise within her at the magnetic touch ; for who cannot know whether love lives or is dead, if the hands meet ? Where words and looks fail, contact asserts. A glad look came into her eyes, He was going to kiss her. She freed herself in a moment, and taking a handkerchief from the pocket of the dressing-gown she was wearing, she brushed the false bloom from the cheek he was to kiss, and offered it silently.

He kissed her as if he would never leave off, and half carrying her, seated her with him upon a couch. It would have been quite clear to anyone, that this unhappy woman was living in the moment and the moment only. She had not glanced one instant forward since her eyes fell on her brother. She saw him and was with him. Could she take in more than that ?

All this time Madeline stood apart, not daring to break in upon them. After some little time the clergyman remembered that this could not go on. He must make some arrangement quickly, to take his darling away, for away he meant to take her. So with this thought he said to her, "How soon can you put a dress on ? We must go away."

She did not answer him. Her head still rested on his shoulder. He waited a few moments, and then put the question to her again. He was loath to disturb her, so he rested his own head against hers as it lay on his shoulder, and again waited. He started up. Madeline had given

a shriek, and had flown towards them. He looked first at her, and then at the drooping head that lay against him.

"Bring some water ; she's fainting," cried the clergyman to the husband, who was acting the part of a statue. He seized one of his sister's hands, and Madeline the other, and they rubbed them between their own. But as they rubbed the hands stiffened within them.

What a fate ! that this should have come in the very hour of deliverance, at the apparent outset of a new and happy life. It seemed to poor Rockingham too cruel a blow that God had struck him. Yet his sister had had her dearest wish. She had died with her head pillowed on that bosom, and with his arm about her. And let us hope that a happier life than she had imagined was hers.

CHAPTER LVII.

KEZIAH'S MAY-DAY.

NEVER had a brighter May-day shone than the one that followed the tragedy we have described. Maud Towers and her friend Keziah, opened it by going out before breakfast. Maud wore a light-grey costume, with ribbons of pale shade. Her widow's weeds were laid aside. Her feelings had gone against this. As she remarked to Keziah, she did not want to appear to the world with a label, "To Let," on her. But if Keziah would not leave off black unless she did, she must do it ; though she said, the cases were not at all parallel ones. Keziah, who looked best in pink, wore a print of that colour, and a white straw hat with pink ribbons. But her cheeks were sadly wanting in pink. They were pale enough though she had only just returned from Paris, whither Maud had spirited her away, after she had received Elworthy's letter. She had had a hard fight with death for her friend. Keziah seemed to have lost all wish to live. She had made no remark whatever about the letter, and her silence was the most frightful feature of all in Maud's eyes. It showed as nothing else could have done, how she had been hit. Maud had taken her to Paris, thinking that the utter change of scene might accomplish what she could not herself effect. Maud was angry with Elworthy, too, for the course he had taken ; and as her anger rose against him, it died out towards poor Keziah, who was equally blameworthy.

They had come back again now, and Keziah was able to speak of her

miserable love affairs ; and had gone so far as to wonder whether he would come back to her after all. It was a very good sign. Still Maud was just as far from knowing what would be the end of it, for she could not help thinking that, perhaps, Keziah had worn Elworthy's love out. But of this she said no word to her friend.

As they started out in the fresh morning, and passed down the garden, fragrant with hawthorn blossom, for it was already out in that sheltered nook, Maud said—

“We will wear a breast-knot of this to-night.”

“I wish you had not promised we would go,” said Keziah, wearily. “It seems so unnatural to be meeting company one knows nothing about and cares less.”

“Well, I have promised, at any rate ; and go we will. I'm not going to have you brooding and moping, all for want of a little effort on my part.”

“But what do you expect going to a stupid party to do for me?”

“I'll answer that when you've been.” After all, it was something to have Keziah express an opinion at all. It was a vast improvement on her apathetic agreeing to everything, as she had done since Elworthy's letter to her.

“What are you thinking about?” asked Maud of Keziah, when they had walked along in silence for some time.

“I was thinking how strange it is that Jubal is to be married to-day, and that I should have no part in it of any kind.”

“Well, you never expected to have any part in it.”

“Oh, no ; not for a long, long time. But ours does seem to be such an ill-assorted house.”

“I think it's a great mistake for Jubal to marry,” returned Maud. “He's too young to know his own mind.”

“I'm afraid Laura won't make a good wife for anybody, either.”

“The worst feature in the case is that she's coming to live next door to me,” said Maud, irritably.

“That's your point of view, Maud. There is a worse. Poor uncle David ! Fancy his having her. It was a bad day for poor uncle when he took Jubal into his house. But look, Maud, what a bringing up he had. What can you expect?”

“You had the same, whatever it was.”

“Well, he was a boy, and I suppose that made some difference. Besides, father never liked him ; and I think he did like me at bottom.”

"He couldn't help admiring you, Kizzy, whether he liked you or not. An outsider mightn't take to you at once, nor admire you. You are too outspoken, perhaps, for that. But such a rare honesty as you have—certainly quite beyond anyone I ever knew—cannot but command respect and admiration from your worst enemies."

Keziah shook her head sadly. "Nothing is worth much except love," she said. "Opinions vary so ; and, at the best, they are but opinions. But love—it just takes you as you are, faults and all, and makes the best of you." Then she reverted to the previous subject—Jubal's marriage. "To think that I should not have known he was going to be married to-day, but for uncle's servants telling ours !" And, in spite of Maud's efforts, the conversation kept in this vein during the whole of their walk ; and when they returned to breakfast, Keziah had no appetite, though she had been out, which distressed her friend a good deal. Their walk had been at so early an hour that the post did not come till breakfast was nearly over. It brought a letter from Gerald, which ran as follows:—

"MY DEAR SISTER,—I never felt so fixed in my life. I don't know whom to be angry with. I would give anything to find someone to kick. Among them they have got Elworthy to fix the marriage-day. And I tell you he'll do it. He's working himself up till he'll be ill—I hope he will—before the day. That would give us time to look round again. What a fool he was ! But, there, a heart of stone might pity him, to see him. Have you no plan to suggest ? There are so many sides to the question. Miss Beredith herself is so good a girl, and so unselfish—in fact, so true a woman in my opinion—I feel myself a brute to be planning and scheming what will be such a disaster in her eyes. It ought never to have come about at all. Oh, if people weren't such asses ! I often think that it's all humbug when people talk about having gone in the dark, and so fallen into trouble. It seems to me there's more light in the world than these fools can bear, so they shut their eyes, and walk like that. I don't know whether you'd better tell *her* or not. I do wish you could suggest something, for I firmly believe—and mind you I'm not joking—that Elworthy will make short work of himself, if it comes to it."

Whatever was meant by the last observation, there the letter ended, unfinished, as it something had interrupted the writer.

Maud decided that she would show the letter to Keziah. She could not take the responsibility of keeping it from her.

Keziah took it all in, and then, without a single comment upon it, but

with a face full of some strong resolve, she said, "Come, let us see what we will wear this evening ;" and assumed a gaiety of bearing which struck a cold chill to her friend's heart. She romped and played with Leonard in a manner which astonished the child not a little, as he had come to think her rather dull. She ran races with him in the garden, and pelted him with daisies. On the whole, Maud thought Keziah was going out of her mind. At last, when she stopped, flushed from her running, Maud said to her, "I wouldn't do so if I were you, Kizzy ; people will, think—well, I hardly know what they will think."

"That I am out of my mind, I suppose," replied Keziah. "Do not be frightened, Maud. I have been mad, but I am sane enough now. I have been mad," she repeated. "It's quite true ; but it is gone."

Maud doubted it. She hoped within herself that Keziah's gaiety would take another turn before the evening, and that she would not make herself remarkable at the Denleighs'.

Keziah's gaiety did keep up, however ; and she dressed herself with the greatest care, and seemed to be taking pleasure in it.

When Mrs. Towers and Mrs. Hackbit were ushered into the drawing-room at the Denleigh manor-house that evening, the colonel was lounging in an easy-chair near one end, in the enjoyment of all the privileges of an invalid. The room, though large, was well filled with guests. Keziah had not expected to see so many people.

Mrs. Denleigh met them, graciously extended the tips of her fingers, and led them to her husband—a formality all guests went through. He, with his eyeglass up, surveyed the two girls critically, and seemed mightily pleased with Keziah's appearance, though for Maud he had not a second look. He begged Keziah, rather in a commanding tone, which he had brought with him from India, and preserved more carefully than anything else he had brought, to indulge an invalid, and sit down and talk to him. Keziah could but obey ; so she seated herself on an ottoman, while Maud was carried off by the hostess, and Keziah soon saw her in conversation with a tall young gentleman, whom she believed she had seen somewhere : it was Winterfold.

The colonel, noticing the direction Keziah's eyes had taken, began to discuss the young gentleman with some asperity and a candour extraordinary from a stranger to a stranger. He had developed a habit, in the years since he had been an invalid, of talking in the most familiar way with any girl who took his fancy, just as if he had always known her, and she knew all his affairs. He did this, it must be owned,

chiefly to annoy his wife, which was his only relish in life now, except these same talks with pretty strangers. So he ran on in his usual style.

Keziah said nothing in reply. She could not help noticing that Mrs. Denleigh was casting annoyed glances in their direction. As for Winterfold, a short time ago he would have given anything to be talking to the girl who was now beside him, while at present he cared nothing at all about it. He had seen Madeline since then. So Maud was but ill-entertained, and looked somewhat bored.

"Your friend is not enjoying herself," remarked the colonel. "I will find someone to amuse her; that is, Mrs. Denleigh shall. There's the oddest little man here—you can't see him now, because he's hidden in that group of tall ladies—well, he's the drollest and oddest man I ever met with. He has only been here once before, and that was with some young relative of his, who is a friend of my nephew's. He'd make anybody laugh."

"Would he?" said Keziah, with failing interest.

"He's quite rough in his manners, and altogether uneducated. It was Allan who would have him invited. Mrs. Denleigh objected as a matter of course, especially after he had been here, and she had seen what he was like. But, you see, I had never been so amused for years, so I insisted that he should be invited again. For," he added in a lower tone, "I can't afford to throw away any amusement now. You can have no idea how dull it is here from week's end to week's end. This droll man is quite a godsend. He looks like a fish out of water in a dress suit. I do wish these ladies would move away, so that you could see him. The first time he came he was destitute of h's, but now he has too many, and he takes everything *au grand sérieux*. I got him to sit by me, and drew him—slang term, my dear, but you will understand. It was wonderfully easy work. He told me all about himself, where he was born, and everything he had done, I should think. Look, you can see him now."

Keziah could see him, and recognized her uncle. "Oh," she cried instantaneously, rising from her seat, with fury in her face, "you hypocritical, detestable man, how I despise you!"

He looked astounded.

"The gentleman you have been insulting and making game of—for a gentleman he is, whatever his birth or bringing up—just as you are no gentleman, whatever your birth or your bringing up—is my uncle; and I

shall go directly and tell him how you have been making game of him and we will leave your house together."

The colonel stammered out a profuse apology. He was stunned by the idea that this beautiful girl in the pale pink dress could possibly belong to the blundering man who had been the unconscious butt of his jokes.

All eyes were drawn to Keziah as she marched across the room to her uncle. She flung her arms around his neck before the whole assembly. "Come away, uncle," she cried, "and never enter this house again. They do nothing but make game of you, and insult you behind your back."

The lady of the house, deadly white, but stern and cold as marble, remarked icily, "This sort of thing is to be expected, if we invite persons of the class Mr. Rimmon belongs to. I told the colonel so."

Maud had come up to Keziah while she spoke. She was aghast at what had occurred. She felt humiliated, in that it was her friend who was making this scene, when another course might have been adopted without loss of dignity, and yet without loss of effect. But however painful she felt her own position to be, she had no thought of not taking Keziah's part; so she said to Mrs. Denleigh, who was close to her—

"Mrs. Hackbit must have had very grave provocation, to cause her to lose her self-possession in this way;" and with a bow she passed on after David and Keziah, who were leaving the room.

The carriage in which the girls had come had not been ordered to return till a late hour; so they started on foot. David was thoroughly frightened. Keziah was alternately hurling epithets at the colonel and caressing her uncle. "I couldn't imagine who it could be he was talking about," she said, "until all at once he pointed you out. How did you come to know them, uncle?"

"They are friends of Jubal's," replied poor David, in trembling tones.

"And how is it you are not at Jubal's wedding?" asked Keziah.

"Jubal thought it would be best if I were not there."

"Jubal! Jubal! It's always Jubal," said Keziah. "Why do you always do what Jubal asks you?"

Maud was silently walking on the other side of Keziah. She felt the situation to be an extremely awkward one, for obvious reasons; and would have given anything if she and Keziah had not gone to that party. What a scandal it would create, she thought!

Keziah was very little troubled about any scandal. She felt that, how-

ever things looked for her, the position of the colonel and his family was much worse. They would get worse thought of than she would, no doubt. Keziah felt glad she had spoken in the hearing of every one of the party.

When they reached The Chestnuts, Keziah said, "I will go in with my uncle a short time, if you don't mind, Maud." David would not ask Maud to come in, so she went into her own house, while Keziah and her uncle were left alone.

A fire was burning in the dining-room when they entered, and Keziah sat down on a low chair before it, and flung off her cloak, which had been her only covering during that walk home. David sat down on the tails of his dress coat, and looked at her with a pained expression that half broke her heart. "Oh, uncle," she exclaimed desperately, "how hard it is that people like you and me"—she coupled herself definitely with him—"should have such a hard fight with caste."

David did not take in the full meaning of what she said. He was thinking within himself, over and over again, as if a tune were running in his head, "They had me there to make game of me."

When he did speak to Keziah, he said, "Kizzy, did I, do I look very ridiculous?"

"Ridiculous," replied Keziah, bridling. "You look ridiculous! When did you ever look that? Is it ridiculous to look honest, and talk honestly, and to expect fair dealing? That is all you looked, or ever look."

"I'm afraid you are mistaken, Kizzy," said her uncle; and he shook his head from side to side sadly. "I never had a headpiece."

"It wants a headpiece, as you said," replied Keziah, "to tell all the lies required of you by society, and to sift out the small portion of truth that comes in the lies they tell you. They appear to me to be asking questions they never mean you to answer, give you invitations they never mean you to accept, smile at you when they're ever so angry, and look serious when they're laughing at you. That's what I think society is."

David looked uneasy. "Don't you think, Kizzy," he said, hesitatingly, "that it might have been just a little better to have come away, and never gone there any more, without having said what you did?"

"Perhaps it would," Keziah admitted. "But I never did, and never shall, I suppose, think of the right thing at the right moment. But I want to ask you about Jubal. How was it you consented to let him marry so soon? Has he done much in the business to justify his marrying?"

"I don't want to be hard on Jubal," said his uncle. "I thought it

would have been different. I think no man can be a good manufacturer who has not worked up from the beginning, so as to understand every part."

"And Jubal has not done so?"

"No; I fear he has become rather wild. He had been so harshly treated at home that I did not like to treat him harshly too. I have been trying kindness."

Keziah couldn't help smiling at the idea of David treating anybody harshly.

"When are they coming here?"

"Not for a long time. They are going to France and Italy. It's a very quiet wedding," went on David, meditatively; "nobody is invited, I believe."

"But now, uncle David, I want to ask you to do me a favour. If I want to go somewhere, all in a hurry, will you go with me? Will you manage it somehow?"

"You know I will do anything for you."

"Then I shall count on you," said Keziah, rising.

Before Keziah had got out of the house, the old tune was ringing in his head, to the exclusion of all else—"They had me there to make game of me."

It may, perhaps, be imagined by some, that the party Keziah and her friends quitted in such a manner was left in a state of confusion and bewilderment. By no means. The doors once closed, the men smiled, the women shrugged their shoulders slightly, and all went on as if nothing had occurred. A girl who had, so it appeared, risen from the lower classes, had acted very rudely, that was all. It would be a lesson not to mix with that class of persons.

CHAPTER LVIII.

JOSHUA'S JOKE.

"BEFORE Hackbit died," Mr. Rimpler observed to Mr. Rimmon, one day when they were alone together, "he had almost resolved, I believe, to found a family, and if he had kept away from drink, he could have done it. Now, you don't drink."

"No, I don't drink," echoed Joshua, looking in an expressionless way at Rimpler, and wondering what he was driving at.

"Well, don't you know by this time," went on Mr. Rimpler, "that money can do any mortal thing? Some fools accumulate their money till they're up to the neck in it; and they die, and it all goes to some one else. My theory is, the man's a fool who does that. Let me have enough money at my back to last me out as many years as I can live, and I'll answer for it, the day I die shall see the last half-penny spent, if it had to be for a soft pillow, bought at the last moment, to die on. Now, you can form a fair estimate of how long you've to live; and you know, and I know, that you could live like a lord for the remainder of your days. Gold attracts gold as surely as a magnet does a needle. Without any humbug, you're a very rich man. Then why not live like one, and enjoy yourself? And," said he, with a smile with a good deal of fun in it, "you can build a chapel if you like; that will keep up appearances. They'll make you a magistrate, and return you to Parliament yet."

Joshua smiled with pleasure, as these visions of his own greatness and importance were shown to him. "What do you advise me to do?" he said. "I like your chapel idea." And inwardly he thought that he would be making amends, if he built a chapel with his ill-gotten gains. Then it occurred to him that it seemed an awful thing to be putting that money for such a purpose; and the thought was so strong upon him after it had once come into his mind, that he couldn't help saying something about it to Rimpler.

"Do you think such a thing might bring a curse with it?"

"As to that," remarked Rimpler, with a dry laugh, "it's a sort of thing I don't consider, in any way. But if you do, you can put the speculation money to that use, instead of the other."

"It doesn't really seem," Mr. Rimmon said solemnly, "as if God were angry with me, after all, or else how is it all my speculations have succeeded so well? Look at the times I have doubled the money I have put in, at a stroke."

"Now's the time to drop speculating," rejoined Rimpler, ignoring the former part of the sentence. "Leave off with your pocket full, or you may find your fortune change all of a sudden, and then where are you?"

"Well," returned Mr. Rimmon, "it shall be out of the speculation money. I'll build the grandest chapel in the Connexion, and we'll arrange about buying the ground at once. I should like to buy that piece of ground opposite to the church, so that my chapel shall stare that out of countenance."

"You can get it, no doubt," said Rimpler. "You see you can offer anything you like for it."

"I will make inquiries about it at once."

"But that is the minor concern after all," resumed Rimpler. "You must build yourself a house ; a mansion, sir, a mansion."

Mr. Rimmon stared in amazement.

"Yes, why not," said Rimpler "in the very heart of the neighbourhood you were born in."

Mr. Rimmon had never thought of this.

"If I build a house," went on Mr. Rimmon grandly, rising to the occasion, "it shall be such a house as there's not for miles round. I have in my mind's eye a picture of what it should be."

"It's been built up pretty quick then," said Rimpler. "What's it like ?"

"I went on business when I was a young man," replied Mr. Rimmon, as if imparting a valuable piece of information, "to a gentleman's country-seat ; and I sat in the hall waiting, ever so long."

"Dear me," remarked Mr. Rimpler, "what a privilege!"

Mr. Rimmon, with his eyes fixed on the distant picture, continued, "The hall was panelled in wood, and was covered with all sorts of mottoes. I shall have my hall panelled in wood, and covered with mottoes ; and they shall all be in foreign languages, like those were."

"How very elevating," said Mr. Rimpler, "but not a bad idea. Shall I choose the mottoes ?"

"No, thank you," responded Mr. Rimmon solemnly. "I shall choose them out of the dictionary. There are plenty of them at the end of the dictionary. And some of them must be done in foreign letters. Those were. I couldn't read one of them. I asked a footman what they were ; and he said they were Greek and German. I shall have Greek and German."

Mr. Rimpler burst into a laugh. "Do you mean to set up for a scholar as well as a grandee ? You'd better copy all your mottoes into a pocket book, and learn them off, or else you'll get stumped when someone asks you what they are."

"We will go up to London, Rimpler, and buy the furniture. I shall buy the best there is to be had, and give the best price."

"Before the house is built ?"

Mr. Rimmon deigned to give no reply, but went on, "Let us get this

thing done quickly, Rimpler ; I should like to feel what it's like before I die. Hackbit should have been quicker."

"Well, m'm," remarked Sarah to her mistress, about eleven o'clock one May morning, fanning her hot face with her apron, "this is what I call something like. It's worth while cleaning up when everything's to look so spruce and new. I'm sure that old furniture wasn't worth the beeswaxing. The more it shined, the uglier it seemed to look ; and it seemed to give it a brassy look, as if it would make you look at it, when it was shining like looking-glass ; and just to think of it all going to a auction, just as I'd beeswaxed it, for all them dealers to mess and maul. And I'm sure this furniture looks most beautiful—leastways I never saw nothink like it."

Mrs. Rimmon heartily coincided in these remarks, for the furniture was of the newest and most fashionable. From the time Rimpler had fired his brain, by picturing to him what his money could do for him, Joshua had been plunging and snorting in the harness of a dingy house, dingy furniture, and a shabby wife. The latter he consequently took especial pleasure in snubbing and frightening. To this end he went down to the auction rooms in Jumley and ordered the men to fetch away his furniture on a certain day, without warning his wife, having previously been to London and made purchases, which were to arrive on the day of removal, at a late hour.

So it fell out that Mrs. Rimmon was in the act of laboriously darning a hole at the corner of one of the horsehair chairs, when Sarah announced in appalling accents that a lot of men had "come for the furniture," they said.

"What furniture?" asked Mrs. Rimmon.

One of the men, after the manner of the Black Country, had followed the maid, and now advancing, said—

"We've horders to move heverything."

"There must be some mistake," Mrs. Rimmon replied, in her own mind dreading lest by some unaccountable means they had been suddenly ruined.

The man pushed a paper towards her. "This is the horder," he said Mrs. Rimmon could not read, but she knew her husband's writing.

"But can't you wait till he comes home?" inquired Mrs. Rimmon.

"Hour horders hare to move the things. Come hon, mates," he added, "the sale's to come hoff at one o'clock, and not a gimcrack of hall this

can be catalogued. It'll have to be sold at the lag end. Plenty o' worms in this, ain't there, mum?" he added, pointing to a mark in the table

Mrs. Rimmon made no reply, but stared helplessly, as the men began to remove the goods. She and Sarah followed them from one apartment to another mechanically, and saw one thing after another carried out.

The stair carpets were up, and rolled, and then the men went upstairs, followed by Sarah and Mrs. Rimmon. The first room they entered was that which had been Jubal's.

"You can chuck that rubbish through the window, and some one can catch it," observed one of the men, eyeing the things satirically; "or, stop you can put it all in your trouser pocket."

He then produced a set of bed keys, and commenced to take to pieces the bed on which Jubal had passed many a sleepless night.

That room was soon finished off, so was Keziah's. In Sarah's the three men stood and laughed at the box which did duty for a washstand and dressing-table, in consequence of Mr. Rimmon having refused to supply any proper accommodation of that sort.

The last room they entered was the spare bed-room. The bedstead in this room was of a ponderous description, and required a considerable amount of taking down. It happened that the first two waggons passed down the High Street of Jumley before this was completed. As they passed with their freight, Miss Dorcas Rimmon was in the act of displaying her latest millinery triumph in her window; and she, hearing a considerable rumble, looked out just as they were passing. Her astonishment may be imagined. Joshua's furniture could not be mistaken. What could this mean?

In a wild state of alarm Miss Dorcas sallied forth, in a space of time so small that it did her great credit. Portions of the ponderous bedstead were being carried downstairs when she put in an appearance at the house of Rimmon. She had previously looked through the windows from the outside—an easy matter in their present bare state.

"Ann," she cried, at the top of her parrot-like voice, "where are you? Come directly, and tell me what it all means."

The men who were carrying the portions of bedstead downstairs appeared to be much amused. What she said could have very little in it to provoke merriment; it must have been the tone.

Mrs. Rimmon was in the spare bedroom; and the way was blocked

by other massive portions of bedstead. She made her way, however, past the men, and showed herself on the other side of the barrier of goods.

"What's the meaning of this, Ann?" asked Miss Dorcas from the other side of the barrier.

"I'm sure I know nothing about it," replied Mrs. Rimmon, beginning to cry. "I suppose it's Joshua's doings."

"Perhaps he's agoin' to Hostralia," suggested one of the men. This suggestion threw poor Mrs. Rimmon into such a paroxysm of terror that she was speechless. Besides, it appeared really to be a most natural outcome of the selling-off of everything, even the beds from under them. Dorcas, who was pretty proof herself against sudden fear, could not help thinking there might be truth in the man's suggestion. It flashed into her mind that he might be about to depart in disgrace, due in some way to those lost papers she had had to do with; so she was unusually silent while the remainder of the things were removed. At length the house was shorn of everything except the cooking utensils, which the men said were "homitted in the horder, likewise the kitchen table and chairs," the former of which they declared gratis would "perhaps sell as hold hiron, the latter as firewood." And when the men had finally departed, and Sarah in a kind of desperation, produced potatoes, and began to peel them savagely, Dorcas said to her sister-in-law, in the tone of an executioner, "You're ruined! It's his villany. It's all along o' that. And I believe that snake in the grass, Rimpler, is at the bottom of it. He was always ferretin' among his affairs."

Mrs. Rimmon cast frightened glances at Sarah, who was cutting away at the potatoes, to the great sacrifice of the eatable portions. Sarah observed the look.

"Don't mind me, missis," said the faithful girl. "If I hadn't known how to keep my mouth shut, I should never ha' been here now."

"Then keep your mouth shut, as you're so much practised in it," said Dorcas.

"Thank you, miss, and the same to you," retorted Sarah, with a comical dignity, curtsying, knife and potato in hand, "though you mayn't be as practised in it as me, or master's affairs mightn't be as public as they seem to be."

"Where is Joshua?" inquired Dorcas of her sister-in-law.

"I don't know. I never do know," replied Mrs. Rimmon. "I wish he'd come home now. I haven't wished that this many a day."

Mrs. Rimmon in her trouble forgot herself so far as to make this latter remark, and was soon made aware of the fact.

"You're a pattern wife, you are, to say that," Miss Dorcas began. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself—and before the servant too. If you'd been a better wife, it might never have come to this."

"I'm sure I've done my best," said Mrs. Rimmon; "and it does seem hard to be dragged off to Australia to end my days in a foreign land, that it does. I did think to lay my bones where I've been born and bred. I'm sure they'd never rest in foreign earth, with foreign flowers a-growin' on it, and foreign feet a-treadin' over it."

"Don't you alarm yourself," replied Miss Dorcas spitefully. "If Joshua is going, as I think he is, it's more than likely he's on the way. Do you think he'd want to take a thing like you with him?"

Mrs. Rimmon looked as if all this coming suddenly upon her would prove too much for her feeble brain. But the faithful Sarah answered Miss Dorcas for her.

"Don't you trouble yourself to make more harm than there is," she said. "If so be that the missis is left, which I don't believe because you say it, she won't be a-wantin' for a home, because I've got hands. I haven't stood by her all these years, to go away at the last when she wants me the worst." And she pushed the pot of potatoes on to the fire, and then asked, in a tone anything but cordial, if Miss Dorcas were going to stay to dinner, "because," she said, "there's nothing but bacon, and it isn't very lean."

"I'm going to stay to see my brother, if he comes," she replied; "and I don't want any dinner."

"There'll be all the more left for them as do, then," said Sarah, angrily unhooking a portion of bacon from the ceiling, and cutting savagely into it.

Mrs. Rimmon sat in silence, and watched her fry the bacon and steam the potatoes, and sighed deeply from time to time. But though Sarah put the meal as temptingly as she could before her mistress, she could eat nothing; she was much too wretched for that.

Finding Mrs. Rimmon could not touch her dinner, Sarah made some tea for her, and went to the hens' nest and got a new-laid egg and boiled it. But this was equally unsuccessful. If Mrs. Rimmon would not eat, at the least poor puss must have her dinner; so Sarah called her. But puss, who usually came so readily, did not put in an appearance.

"Where can the cat be? Oh, save us all," cried Sarah, as if suddenly

recollecting something, "if those men haven't been and took the old cupboard as stood in the passage out there, and the old cat was in it, and her new kittens. I'll go down to that sale-room directly. Poor thing!" And she put on her bonnet and shawl, and rushed off, pinning the shawl as she went.

When Sarah was gone, Miss Dorcas informed Mrs. Rimmon that those papers Joshua had lost were at the bottom of this, and managed to make her arrive at the very verge of insanity by the horrors she depicted as the outcome of it all.

It was about three o'clock when Sarah returned in possession of the poor cat and three kittens.

"Them men was brutes, and I told 'em so," she broke out. "They was a settin' of her up for auction, they was, and 'er a spittin' like mad. Poor pussy," she added, stroking the adventurer.

Half-past four is the usual Black Country tea-time; and at that hour tea was ready. Miss Dorcas had sat on, for in her own mind she believed Joshua would turn up; and she was not destined to be disappointed. That gentleman did turn up, just at that time; and his features did relax into a smile at sight of the desolate picture that met his eye as he entered by the back way.

"Oh, Joshua, Joshua!" cried Mrs. Rimmon, rising from her seat, "why didn't you tell me that we were ruined?"

"You bestir yourselves, and help these men to bring in these things," was the reply.

The words were meaningless till Mrs. Rimmon saw with her own eyes packages passing the window, unmistakably furniture.

"Oh, missis," exclaimed Sarah, clapping her hands, "it's such a beautiful shape, and we're going to new furnish, that's it;" and she set to work with a will, to render all the assistance in her power, while her mistress, not less appalled by the arrival of the new furniture than she had been by the departure of the old, stood where she was, and watched the men struggle in under their heavy weights.

"They're not Jumley men at all," said Sarah, explanatorily; "they've come from London, and they're goin' to put the carpets down as they've brought."

Miss Dorcas roused herself to say, in a stately manner, "I saw through it all the time, Ann." After this speech she said she should just go home now, and come up to-morrow to see how things looked, when they were a bit straight.

By midnight the house of Rimmon had undergone a veritable transformation. The household did not, however, retire to rest till much later ; there was too much to admire. Mr. Rimmon was actually on tolerably friendly terms with his wife, except for an occasional snub. He had had his joke, and it had succeeded admirably ; and he had not explained it to her.

Before the next day was over, Mr. Rimmon actually forgot himself so far as to enlighten his wife on the subject of the prospective palatial residence ; and it would be difficult to decide which pleased her most—the idea of the glory to come, or the fact that her lord had actually volunteered the informaton.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE PAINS OF FREEDOM.

AFTER her mother's death and burial, Madeline returned to Mr. Saltring's without any resistance on her father's part. It was agreed between her uncle and herself that she should not part suddenly from those who had befriended her in her sore need. Moreover, they determined not to be precipitate in letting the events which had occurred become known to their relatives, for Mr. Rockingham well knew that nothing short of the most dexterous action would ensure for his niece any recognition by them. Besides the Saltrings, only one family was admitted into confidence, namely, the Towers ; and that came about in this way.

Mr. Rockingham had resolved to make inquiries as to the places Pelbois had visited when he had come to Langton ; and fortune so far favoured him that it was of Jody Waddy he chanced to inquire first.

Early in the morning after his return from Manchester, he looked first on the church steps for Jody, who was indeed there, smoking his little dirty pipe. He touched his hat as the clergyman approached, and then waited for Mr. Rockingham to address him.

"Have you seen a strange foreign-looking gentleman about here anywhere?" Mr. Rockingham asked.

"An' if I haven't," responded Jody, solemnly looking upwards, "may the Lord——"

"It's not worth swearing about, Jody," put in the clergyman. "It's a plain question, and requires only a plain answer."

"Well then," resumed Jody, in a tone which implied that he was quite ready to give the plain answer required, but that he perhaps took the word in a wrong sense, "he wor the darnedest furriner as ever stepped mortal earth, and he'd got the darnedest tongue——"

"That isn't quite what I meant," explained Mr. Rockingham. "Do you happen to know whom he came to see?"

"It might ha' been me," replied Jody, shaking his shaggy head, "by the way as he called me 'my friend,' when he ought to ha' knowed, too, as I'd rather be friends with a polecat, or my missis yonder, than 'im. I've never been well sin' he wor here, and I'm feared as he wished me ill."

"Well, well," said Mr. Rockingham, growing impatient under this tirade, for he felt sure he referred to Pelbois, as in a place like Langton a foreigner was so rare a visitor. "What was he like?"

"I don't know," answered Jody. "I couldn't abide to look at 'im. He looked black enough, I know that; an' he pulled a hat over his face, he did; an' he asked me to show 'im the way to Doctor Towers's, an' then had the face to grumble at the road. An', O Lord, don't I wish I had the burying of 'im; he wor the aggravatinest furriner——"

Jody, to his utter surprise, found himself left at this point by the clergyman. He looked after him as he disappeared down the road, with a fixed eye of disapproval.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "I thought he wanted to know about it, but it's like 'em all—they all leave me to talk to the ghosteses. I ain't sure the ghosteses ain't better to talk to; they don't snap a man's nose off, in a-answerin' of 'em, the ghosteses don't. Old Betty might, but she ain't a right and proper ghost, to my mind; an' she couldn't walk for a good while afore she died, so I don't suppose 'er ghost can walk." And the old man filled his dirty little pipe again. It was a habit of his to haul about a spade, as another man might have done a stick, as a mark of office. He had got his spade now. He only knew one song, and that was appropriate to his office; and between his puffs he sang it now, though he hadn't the faintest notion of keeping in tune, and had considerably mutilated the words, in years of repetition. The refrain he liked best was—

"I've buried 'em deep an' my duty I've done;"

and one line, referring to the numbers the grave-digger of the song had buried, always brought to his face an individual smirk. Once in singing this song at the Bull's Head, when a little the worse for drink, he

had remarked to one of his companions—no, not companions, for he had none,—but to one of those seated beside the same fire with himself at that time, “If there’d only come a pestilence, as they talk of in the church, an’ I could ’ave the buryin’ of ’em, I believe I wouldn’t mind dyin’ at the end of it myself. When I know as I’ve buried more than any other sexton, my duty I’ll have done.”

Mr. Rockingham was far out of reach of the song, for rapid strides had carried him to the corner house, inhabited by the doctor and his family. Doctor Towers had always had a friendly feeling for Mr. Rockingham, because he had never taken advantage of his priesthood to inquire into private affairs ; so he was always welcome when he called.

The tiny sitting-room was empty when Mr. Rockingham entered it, and sat down on one of the chintz-covered chairs, and looked down the street through the small window.

The doctor was just starting out on his first round, but he came a once to Mr. Rockingham.

“You are just going out, I fear,” he began, “and what I have come about cannot be put in a nutshell. Had I not better walk with you?”

“If you don’t mind,” said the doctor, “I should be very glad if you would, as there are some patients I ought to see early. There’s a good deal of sickness about.”

The clergyman took his hat and put it on, as the sign that he was ready ; and he and the doctor passed out of the door, and had soon left the straggling village behind.

“I hope you will not think,” began the clergyman, with some diffidence, “that what I am going to say is undue interference with your affairs. If you will have the patience to hear me, you will see that at any rate. I am as deeply implicated as any one can be in the affair of which I am going to speak, and my only motive is to liberate you, if possible, from what must be, if my surmises are correct, a most bitter bond. A man who has caused me the bitterest trouble my life has known is, I find, also connected with your house.”

The doctor’s great chest heaved, and his piercing eyes caught all the expression of the clergyman’s face as he spoke.

“The name of your married sister is the same as that of the man I have alluded to. I have traced the man to your house.”

The doctor’s face became very pale.

"Will you tell me in the same friendly spirit in which I ask, if that man ever professed to marry your sister?"

"He did marry her," replied the doctor, hoarsely.

"Can you give me the date?"

"It was February, 18—."

"You are sure of that?"

"I have reason enough to be sure."

"Then," said the clergyman, "I am, indeed, a messenger of good to you."

"How can you be?"

"He is not your sister's husband."

"Explain yourself."

"He married my sister before that date."

The doctor stood still in the road. The clergyman also stopped. The two men looked at each other, a new meaning in each face. What a bond there is in a common sorrow! That interchanged look made these two men brothers.

"Strange, passing strange!" said Towers. "How can I rejoice in your presence? I feel as if you had taken my place in a prison-cell. All the rest is small," he added, thinking of his sister, "compared with her bearing his name and being his wife. That he has betrayed, ruined her, seems nothing to it. At least she is still mine, and need never trouble herself about him again."

"How you must have suffered," responded the clergyman sadly, "to have learnt your lesson so well! I too have had to learn that the case is less wretched when a beloved one is cheated and ruined by a bad man, than when he has the right to call her his property, and bid her go and come, and none are able to help or forbid. When I saw Pelbois he told me he had been somewhere after money. Have you indeed been paying him to leave to you what was not his to claim?"

"That is the whole story."

"Then it is over, and I have been a messenger of good after all."

"You have indeed; you have removed the shadow that covered our house. Death removed one; you have removed the other. If things like this happen to me, I shall believe there is a God of mercy after all."

The clergyman did not begin, as some very young curates would have done, to attempt to prove to this man of science the existence of a God of mercy. Mr. Rockingham confined his preaching to the pulpit; moreover, he was far-sighted enough to see that Dr. Towers was taking

a lesson from a Greater Teacher at that moment, for he had given one little glance upward, and his eyes were swimming with tears.

They walked on a little farther, and the doctor said, "You have been so very kind to me, and made yourself so close a friend by what you have done, that it cannot be wrong in me to ask you if your sister is beyond the reach of that man."

"She is beyond the reach of that man, beyond the reach of everyone. Man could not free her, so God did it ;" and he added, as if determined to be thoroughly frank with this man, whom he had respected all along, and now felt a strong affection for, by reason of their common silent suffering—

"My sister had a daughter. She is with me. So God has not left me entirely desolate."

The doctor looked inquiringly.

"You must guess it already. Madeline is my niece ; but I do not wish it to be known at present. I must break it carefully to my family. I would not have Madeline suffer injustice at their hands. She must not go to them or be known to them unless in her rightful position."

"Pride is a hard dictator at times," remarked Dr. Towers, with a sigh.

"That is true," replied the vicar, "and my family I have found as hard as ever, even when I took my poor darling's remains to their resting-place in the family vault. But I have a plan in my head that shall right Madeline, and until then, she shall remain at Mrs. Saltring's as before, which she is very willing to do."

More might have been said, but the doctor's time was of importance, and they were at the gate of the house he was to visit first.

Dr. Towers was so light hearted when he entered his patient's room, so very chatty, that the very sight of him produced a good effect ; and when he had left that house, and was once more in a country-lane, he found himself unwontedly singing. So does sudden freedom from a long-borne and terrible burden bring to the physically strong a renewed vigour of spirit which is rejuvenescence. Towers saw before him in the lane two or three little boys, truants from school, throwing stones at a tin can on a gate post. He remembered so well the days when "shying" at an object had been his idea of bliss, especially in school hours, that he sympathised with the little scapegraces, and stood still to watch their success and applaud ; and finally he distributed halfpence among the young rascals, who doubtless deserved a whipping instead. He went on his way

with such a light tread and such a singing heart that he could hardly recognize himself. His long lane had had a turning, and had led him into rich meadows, ease and plenty. A miracle had been performed. Happiness would be restored to his home; and he could make it a home now. There would be no drag upon his purse. And as everything smiled around him and within him, a sudden check, from whence he could not have told, put a momentary stop to his delirium of happiness; and a feeling of shame crept over him. Why had he believed himself God-forsaken, when all the time this God was caring for him, and providing a means of escape? An overwhelming feeling of humility took possession of him; his whole nature thawed; and hidden away as he was from mortal gaze, he wept aloud. This was succeeded by a happier frame than ever, though not quite so overflowing; and he hurried on to his next patient, and through all his morning's round, as if work were no work. Then when at last he was at liberty to return home to his usual early dinner, he made some purchases of special dainties in the village, out of their reach hitherto, and sent them on before him to herald the approach of better fortune.

Miss Towers took in the basket herself when it arrived, and called her sister's attention to it.

"What can be the meaning of his spending all this money?" said Madame Pelbois, as we shall continue to call her. "These things must be so expensive. It's so early in the season."

"I tell you what it is," said Amy, putting her thin hands together tightly; "we are somehow in luck."

"Very much so, indeed," said Dr. Towers, coming upon them. "We shall be hereafter as other people, peaceful and unmolested. Isn't that something?"

The two poor ladies looked almost scared. What could they think? He took each by an arm, and led them into the little sitting-room, and closed the door.

"Girls," he said—it had been years since he had used that term—"I declare for the first time this room does seem to be horribly small and inconvenient."

His sisters dared not speak. They were almost afraid of this mood of his. The doctor was only amused by the fear in their faces, and tantalisingly went on, holding bad news as it were high above their heads.

"What do you say to the gabled white house, Amy?"

"The gabled white house ! Mr. Richardson's house ?"

"Not Mr. Richardson's now," said the doctor, his face smiling all over. "Don't you think it would suit us ?"

"Why do you talk of such things," answered Louisa deprecatingly, "when you know they are quite out of our reach ?"

"Out of our reach they were," replied the doctor, "so long as other people spent our money for us : but not so if our income were our own. We have never been short of income ; but others have spent it for us ; that has been it : and that is all ended."

"He is dead !" exclaimed Madame Pelbois, with a gasp. "Then he is dead !"

"Dead to you, my Louisa, for ever and ever," said the doctor, taking her face, so thin and careworn, between his two large hands. "He is dead to you. He is to you as if he had never lived. You have had a bad dream, that is all. None of it has ever been," he went on, looking with glowing eyes at the pale face he held. "We must all believe that."

"Tell us what you have heard, at once," insisted Amy. "You have heard something ; tell us the meaning of it all."

"My love," said the doctor, "there is nothing to tell but this. Louie is our own, very own sister, just as if she had never gone away ; no one else has any right over her. There is no more to tell than that. He has been a villain to you, Louie ; but it is all over. He has no right over you ; he never had. He never dare trouble us again. He was a married man at the very time——" He did not finish his sentence, and it was not needed. It was all understood now.

Perhaps the doctor would not have looked so disappointed when Louisa showed no sign of pleasure, had he weighed more carefully the difference between his position and hers. He had looked for a wild outburst of joy from both his sisters at the news he had communicated ; and it was received in dead silence. The doctor had not made allowance enough for the physical and mental degeneration which comes so often to women who sit at home and suffer, while the happier men go forth to work. They had not the power left in them to suddenly rejoice at anything ; but they had that innate fear and suspicion that come of such experience ; and could not allow their minds to trust that they had at last sure ground beneath their feet. When the doctor saw the cold and apathetic way in which they received the news, his heart sank into a depression for the time being, as deep as that which had been his for years until that morning. In his depression he began to ask himself

whether the news he had heard was true, whether he had been too hasty, whether, in fact, their trouble was over; and he felt that nothing could remove this torture of mind but some positive proof. So with a kind of prophetic impulse, he said to his sisters, "You don't realise it. I will fetch you proof;" and went out. As he spoke the words they were echoed back to him as if some one else had spoken them; and a great courage welled up within him. He was not going to seek proof; he was going to fetch it; and naturally enough his feet took him into the vicarage.

He was not long there; and when he came out with, if anything, a more buoyant look on his face than he had worn in the morning, our worthy sexton accosted him with—

"Has a fever broke out, Doctor Towers?"

"Not that I know of," answered the doctor, not wishing to be interrupted.

"O Lord," said Jody, disconsolately, "I thought there wor; you look so jolly glad. And," he added, explanatorily, "other folks's trouble's yours and my blessin', ain't it, doctor? Folks die so as we can live, don't they?"

"I don't get my living by killing people," responded the doctor snappishly, and walked on, with his hand pressed against his side, where his pocket was, as if he had a pain in it. He banged open his door, to the serious damage of the lock. But what of that? He would not be there long, he knew. He found the ladies where he had left them.

"If you want proof," he said, "look here." It was a *bona-fide* copy of a marriage certificate.

"It's true, Louisa," said Amy. "You were never married to him at all;" and she began to feel something of her brother's gaiety of spirit.

"Where is your womanhood, Amy," cried Madame Pelbois bitterly, "that you triumph in my disgrace? If I am not his wife, what am I? A disgraced being, fit only to creep to a corner, and hide, and die."

"Why should you die, because you have been deceived?" replied her brother. "After all, is not anything better than to know yourself the property of that man?"

"At the cost of being no longer an honest woman," rejoined Louisa, with bitter irony. "I am to have my freedom from him at that price."

"Look here," said the doctor, striking the table with his heavy fist till it shook. "Let me hear none of that society cant about honest women. Is society your God to judge you? I believe," he went on, with an energy

that caused the little room to vibrate, "that all this world's judgments will be reversed in another. There can be no disgrace where there is no sin."

"But I live in the world, and what will the world call me when they get to know?"

"Can it matter what the world calls you, when it called the greatest and purest being that ever lived, blasphemer? Hold up your head, and do not fear. Give the lie to any word, by your look. Integrity is stronger than slander, and silent truth invulnerable against busy lies. I promise you, you shall have no time to dwell on this; you shall be up and doing. I mean to take the white house I spoke of; not to leave you in it all day when I'm away, though. I shall do what Mr. Saltring long ago recommended; I shall have a carriage, and you shall go out with me; and you can't think about everything all at once."

Louisa only looked more melancholy at all this, said to cheer her. She would have to learn like a child how not to be miserable; and it threatened to be as hard a lesson as any she had ever had to learn.

The doctor, however was sanguine. Nothing seemed to check the sudden flow of his spirits since he had had the proof.

And before long the white house scheme was carried into execution, much to the general satisfaction of the Langtonians, who looked upon the doctor as their property, and his respectability as in some way or other reflected upon them.

CHAPTER LX.

KEZIAH SPEAKS.

"MAMMA," said Lucy Beredith, looking up from some work she was doing, "I can't be quite happy, for Rupert looks so sad. I thought at least we should be happy to-day, when to-morrow we are to be married."

"You cannot expect him to look happy, my dear, until it is all over. It is afterwards you may hope to make him happy, and then you must not expect everything to happen in a day."

"I wouldn't so much mind, if I could feel sure it would come right afterwards."

"Nobody can know the future," Mrs. Beredith replied; "it is well they can't. You'll be all right, so long as you do not demand too much

of a man who has had his experience. He can't help growing to love you, Lucy. I am sure he was beginning to love you before he saw Keziah. If you are always kind and gentle, and willing to let him be gloomy and silent and never look gloomy and silent yourself because of it, I will answer for it, it will be as happy a marriage as anyone could desire." And the good lady thought in her own mind, and it may be forgiven her, that Lucy was, after all, so much more lovable and more suitable to be Dr. Elworthy's wife than Keziah. "You see, my dear," she went on, "you will go right away from England, and be seeing new things. There will be nothing to remind him of England and trouble; and enjoying things together is sure to prove a great tie."

Lucy smiled, though not very happily. "But what if," she said, with hesitation, "it should all prove wrong afterwards? What can we do then?"

Mrs. Beredith held up her white fat hands deprecatingly. "Those are only morbid fancies," she said, "foolish, morbid fancies. When I married your father, I wondered whether we should get on, and all that sort of thing, and what could happen if we did not. But we got on all right, and were the best of friends, though it wasn't exactly a love match." And her eyelid trembled a little, and her ample bosom heaved.

"But you see, papa had never loved anybody but you."

"But I had loved some one else," replied her mother; and seeing Lucy's astonished look, she gathered her apron up, with her work in it, and abruptly changed the subject. "We'll see if Eliza has finished those things, so that we can fasten up that box, at any rate. You had better come up and have them tried on; or else you may find some difficulty when you get away. You won't find your buttons come off; I've sewn them on. But if anything should come undone, don't forget that the little sandal wood box in the corner of the tin trunk has got everything for mending in it. When I went away with your poor papa to Scotland, I never got to the bottom of one of my boxes; and part of a flounce came off a puce dress I had, quite a favourite of your poor papa's; and we couldn't get any silk to match it, to mend it with, and I was so vexed that none had been put into my box. And when I came back and the boxes were unpacked, there was plenty of that silk at the bottom of one; so my advice to you is, unpack your boxes when you get away, and see what you've got. But you won't have much trouble, because the odds and ends are not spread about as mine were, and all the mending things are together in the sandal box; and other little boxes have each a label

on them, so you can know what's in, by looking outside. When I went away I was always unwrapping or undoing the wrong thing, and you shan't have any of that trouble. But come now, leave what you are doing, and we'll see if the bodices fit. Dear, dear," she said, in going upstairs, "I hope Miss Richards won't be long before sending those dresses; you'll have to go without them if she's much longer; for I'm quite determined no box shall be left to be closed to-morrow morning. None of my boxes were closed the night before, when I went away, and everybody was in such a dreadful flurry on the morning that they didn't get half fastened up; and when we got to Carlisle, they just threw my boxes out of the van on to the platform—those porters are so careless—and one was quite open when I came up to it, and it was so full that your poor papa and two porters had to sit on it to get it to shut again, and all the people laughed; and then it wouldn't lock, because the lock was broken; and your poor papa had to give five shillings to a porter to get some cord of his own and do it up. Oh, the way your poor papa threw about the money! Rupert won't do that, I guess."

They were now standing in Lucy's room, which was in a pretty disorder. Not a chair, not a table but held its treasure of beautiful garments made for this important event. There were far more than could have been necessary; but as a child has never too many dresses for its doll, so the mother can never get enough dresses for her daughter who is going to be married."

"Look, Lucy," said Mrs. Beredith, dropping on her knees in front of one of the open boxes; "all the linen is together in this box. I think it much better that you should have all of one kind of thing together. Mine was sadly mixed up when I went away."

She took no notice that Lucy did not reply to anything she was saying. It was but natural that the child should be quiet. There could be nothing remarkable in that.

The bodices were next fitted, and proving satisfactory, took their place in one of the boxes.

"Who is that coming upstairs?" said Lucy, when she was putting on her dress again.

"How can I tell, my dear?" replied Mrs. Beredith. "But how scared you look! You shouldn't allow yourself to get so nervous."

Mrs. Beredith might have admonished herself on the same subject a moment later, for she uttered a wild cry. In the doorway stood Keziah, with a face so white, eyes so unnaturally dark, and a manner so agitated,

that anyone might have been forgiven for being frightened at sight of her.

Lucy trembled like an aspen. Keziah stared at them both like an animal at bay ; then at all the preparations. Her wild eyes took in everything. With a sudden movement she placed herself before Lucy, and was clutching her at arm's length.

"Lucy," she said, "you cannot do it. You must not do it. You dare not do it !"

Lucy had such a terrified look in her face that her mother interposed.

"Keziah," she said, "it is not kind, it is not generous of you to come like this."

"It is, it is," cried Keziah, looking wildly into Lucy's face, and not at all at Mrs. Beredith. "I know what it is, Lucy. You have no right to do it. You must know you have no right to do it."

"Keziah," said Mrs. Beredith, pitilessly, "I must beg you to leave my child."

"Oh, no, no, no," cried Keziah, "I will never let her go, I will never leave her, till she has promised never to commit this sin against me. Lucy, he is not yours, he is mine, mine," she cried, flinging up her arms, "you know he is mine. God knows he is mine."

Lucy opened her pale lips, and a voice spoke from between them, that neither of the others would have recognized. It was at Keziah she was looking, but to her mother she spoke. "She is quite right," she said. "I thought it could never come to pass." And then her form swayed, and she would have fallen on the floor, but for Keziah ; she was quite senseless in her arms.

"Lay her down," shrieked Mrs. Beredith, "you have no right to touch her. It was an evil day you ever came to this house, Keziah Hackbit." And she fell to chafing her daughter's hands, unloosing her things, and performing all the other offices usual on such occasions.

Lucy's eyes opened, and they fell on a white satin dress that hung on a sheet-covered chair. Her brow was contracted painfully, and she said with great effort, "Take them all out of my sight, mamma. Never let me see one of them again, as you love me."

Mrs. Beredith groaned, and looking fixedly at Keziah, who was holding to a bed-post, she began to rain abuse upon her.

"Look what you have done, and perhaps your cruel heart will be satisfied. Oh, I would not be you for all the world, to have made so

many people miserable as you have. Wherever you have been you have brought sorrow, and all of your own choosing and willing. If I were you, Keziah, I would go to the uttermost parts of the earth and hide myself. You are a very heartless, wicked girl."

Keziah's great eyes stared at Mrs. Beredith, like those of a child who is beaten, it knows not what for. Her face was rigid, and one little hand was so tightly shut by her side that the mark of every nail was left in the pink palm.

She loosed her hold of the bedstead, and moved her hands desolately and helplessly before her. "What can I say? What can I do?" said poor Keziah. "Nobody will believe any good of me, I know. Perhaps," she added, bursting into a passionate flood of tears, "if I had had a home like Lucy's, and a different bringing up altogether, I shouldn't have done all I have. But it's no matter. Oh," she cried, in a heartbroken tone, "if I had never wanted to do what was right at all, I might have been happier. Everything has always gone contrary with me; I will give up trying. Oh, I hope no one will ever like me at all any more; then I shan't make them miserable. Oh, God," she exclaimed with a sudden energy, "I wish I had never been born; it wasn't worth while." Anyone who could have seen her at that moment might have pitied her—except Mrs. Beredith; and how could she be expected to do so, with her own child now lying desolate upon her breast, undone by Keziah?

"You were always so headstrong," cried Mrs. Beredith, roughly. "You would never be advised."

"Who ever tried? You don't know, you don't know, Mrs. Beredith, what it is to be obliged, whether you like it or not, to judge and act for yourself when you are ever, ever so young, and to have no one care what you do because they like you; it makes you headstrong."

"I am sure you had a chance when you came here," said Mrs. Beredith, unbendingly.

"I know it," replied Keziah, humbly. "But I couldn't change my nature all in a minute. Ah," she said, a bitter smile passing over a white face, "those things that are hammered in hard stick fast, and if you pull them out the mark is left. I don't know," she continued, "why I was made with so many corners, and with so much wish not to have any. It doesn't go together, not at all."

"You could always talk," rejoined Mrs. Beredith, "and wisely enough, no doubt. But all your acts have been foolish, all of them."

"It is quite true," said Keziah, with an evident over-willingness to own herself in the wrong. "I have come here now to try and undo some of it."

"A nice way to undo it," retorted Mrs. Beredith, hotly. "You come to seek for yourself, and to make my child desolate—she who loved him all along, better, much better, than you did. How did she treat you? You are proud. You have often said so. You don't like it to be said that he threw you off, and married another."

"Do you think," broke out Keziah, hotly, in her turn, "that that is what I have come for? Do you think I would have come at all, had I believed he would have been happy with her, or she with him?"

"He would have loved her if he had married her," said Mrs. Beredith, caressing the white face that lay upon her bosom; "when he was bound to hear, and it was his duty to think of no other."

"Oh, Mrs. Beredith," cried Keziah, with a face that spoke of experience, "duty and possibility are so far apart sometimes. Love does not come after marriage that has not been there before."

"You know nothing about it," said Mrs. Beredith, "nothing at all."

"Perhaps I know more than most," rejoined Keziah, "about that."

"I suppose Dr. Elworthy knows nothing then," replied Mrs. Beredith, indignantly. "He was neither blind nor mad when he proposed to my daughter."

"Yes," answered Keziah, in a soft voice, and very sadly, "he was both blind and mad. I have trodden this dark path. I could not let him tread it too. He is my husband before God; no one has a right to take him from me. Lucy," she said, suddenly, kneeling down by her side, "can you forgive me?"

"Oh, don't," said Mrs. Beredith, as if she could not bear it.

"Let me kiss you before I go; I may never see you again," begged Keziah, in an enticing tone, so full of pathos, few could have resisted it. "You will kiss me?" she repeated.

The girl turned her face nearer to her mother, away from Keziah, and moaned: "Some day, perhaps; I cannot now."

Keziah looked once at the mother. It was of no use to ask any mark of reconciliation from her, so she left the room and gently closed the door behind her.

CHAPTER LXI

REST AT LAST.

ABOUT seven o'clock the same evening Mrs. Beredith's front-door bell rang, and Dr. Elworthy was announced.

Mrs. Beredith sent down a message that she was unable to see him. This he interpreted in a sense far from the true one. It was, after all, not to be wondered at, on the evening before she was to lose her daughter. But he wrote upon a card, "I most earnestly beg that you will see me."

He expected that on receipt of this she would forthwith make her appearance, flurried, perhaps, and peevish, from being forced against her will. But it was some little time before she came. Her eyes were red and swollen.

Elworthy at once noted this, and attributed it to the prospective loss of her child. She just looked once at the doctor, and saw that something was wrong with him too. She, who had seen him through his worst times of trouble, could not recollect a single occasion when he had looked so ill and wretched as he did now. She almost softened towards him for a moment.

"How ill you look!" she said.

"Mrs. Beredith," he began, advancing towards her with his chin upon his breast, "I am come to prove myself a villain. But you must forgive me, for you will be the gainer."

He instantly perceived she did not understand him. He would have to speak more plainly.

"I who ought to be happy, am perhaps of all men most miserable. In the eleventh hour I come, as I have said, like a villain, to beg for my release."

Mrs. Beredith had had one shock, but she had not expected this to follow it.

"So you have seen her!" was her reply, in a biting tone.

"Seen her!" cried Elworthy, throwing back the hair from his brow with a desperate impatience. "No, I have not. I may never see her again. But I cannot so wrong your daughter as to bind her to me, when with my whole being I love another woman to distraction."

"You might at least have found all this out before," exclaimed Mrs. Beredith, shaking from head to foot.

"I deserve all you can say to me," he answered. "But, believe me, I have tried to do it. I have tried not to break faith, but it was not in human nature. You who have seen my anguish and my temptation, my hopeless misery for love of that woman, which is as strong to-day as ever it was, can you not pity me, a very little perhaps, but still pity me? And perhaps make Lucy know some time, how I thanked her in my heart for her goodwill towards me, and respected her, and would die at this moment could I undo the sorrow I have caused to her and to others?"

Mrs. Beredith turned her head, and cast down her eyes, while she moved one foot restlessly up and down the carpet.

"She will not talk about dying," rejoined Mrs. Beredith at last; "she will do it. Oh, why could you not have let us alone when we were happy, when the poor child had taught herself not to think of you? It was very, very cruel of you. She has not deserved it of you."

"No, she has not deserved it," said Elworthy, compassionately. "I have called myself a villain. If I knew a worse epithet, I would use it now. Mrs. Beredith, hear me, try and hear me. God is my witness that I have tried to fulfil my word to Lucy. That is why I appear in so much worse a light in coming at the eleventh hour to break faith with her."

At the words, "break faith with her," Mrs. Beredith froze again. "You might have spared yourself the trouble, Dr. Elworthy," she said; "Lucy would not have married you. There is a letter on its way to your house now to tell you so." And then she made half a movement, as if to end the interview.

He looked at her, with an accumulated amazement in his face, as if this thing were quite beyond his comprehension.

"Lucy is ill," went on the lady. "I must beg that you will leave me, that I may go to her."

His heart smote him at these words. "She has seen my trouble," he thought, "and has released me voluntarily."

"How shall I speak?" he said. "How shall I express my gratitude to her for her noble act in releasing me of her own accord? Next to her who is indeed a part of my very being, Lucy Beredith ranks among women. Some day, a long time hence, perhaps, I may be able to tell her so."

"Do not mistake the situation, Dr. Elworthy," said the mother, with a terrible effort evident in her manner. "It is this other woman who has done it, and not my poor child. It is Keziah Hackbit who has been here."

His heart at these words beat so violently, he could hear it. He thought Mrs. Beredith must hear it too.

He cried in a frenzied tone, hysterical laughter breaking from him with these words, "She has been here! She! O my love, my love!" He quite forgot he was standing in the presence of the mother of the other girl who loved him, and whom he was forsaking. His cheeks, that had grown so sunken and pale, were flushed with excitement. Wild laughter again and again broke from him, and then the tears, hot and large, rapidly chased each other down his cheeks, and he repeated again and again—

"She came here! She did it! O my brave girl, my own Keziah!"

All this was more than Mrs. Beredith could bear. She fled from the room, and he did not seem to notice that he was alone.

When he did perceive it, however, it was the work of a moment to take his hat, which he had put down on the table, and to rush from the place in an ecstasy of uncontrollable joy. He understood what such an act meant. Keziah had come, and prevented him marrying another. He sped along the streets, by instinct rather than anything else, till he reached his own house. He entered the surgery, where Gerald Harwyn was making an entry in a book.

Elworthy in two strides crossed the surgery to where Gerald Harwyn was standing at the desk, and seizing his hands, the one with the pen as well as the other, knocked over the ink without noticing it in the least, and shook Gerald's hands until his coat sleeves were performing the office of blotting paper in the pool upon the book.

"Gerald, my boy, congratulate me! The 'happy ever after' time of the story has come. A deuced long time it's been coming."

"I congratulate you," said Gerald, in his own mind fearing his poor friend had lost his wits. "But tell me what for."

"Can you ask? You, a man of your intelligence, can ask such a thing? There is but one 'happy ever after' to my story."

"Well, well," said Gerald, not understanding. "If you'll stop mopping up that ink with my coat sleeves, and sit down and tell me all about it, I shall be better able to judge how much right you have to congratulations."

"She's been to her!" said Elworthy, laughing boisterously.

"She's . . . been . . . to . . . her," repeated Gerald, checking the words off on his fingers. "Who has been to whom? Hang it, man, be a little more explicit."

"Keziah, of course," replied Elworthy. "She's been to Lucy and put it all right. I couldn't stand it any longer ; so, after I had seen the last patient, I went round there to beg Lucy to free me. You know I should have sinned against her if I had married her."

"Hang it if I can understand what you have to rejoice so much about!" said Gerald, hotly. "It's very heartless of you, and very selfish, to be thinking so much of yourself, when you have made that sweet girl so miserable. It was a dastardly trick of you."

"I was mad when I did it, you know I was, Gerald ; but I pray Lucy may forgive me."

"Some kinds of madness ought to be punishable, I think," said Gerald, applying blotting paper to his sleeves and the page of the book.

"I think I have been punished for every kind of punishable madness, then," returned Elworthy.

Gerald went on grimly mopping up the ink. "Why didn't you do as I told you, and tell her at once, and not let her go on till the very day before the wedding, and then break off with her. It is a sneaking trick."

"I know it is. Go ahead, old man. Pitch into me as much as you like. Nothing could make me miserable, now I know she loves me enough to have done that."

"Has she been there to-day?" inquired Gerald.

"Yes, to-day. I wonder if she has left Leamington," he added, consulting his watch.

"Of course they have."

"Well, there's another train, yet. The train I am going by. They may not have gone."

"Why, there's a horse coming round," said Gerald. "Why, it's yours, and a boy bringing it!"

"Oh," exclaimed Elworthy, with a burst of joyful laughter, "I left it fastened to the Berediths' palings."

"I wish to goodness you hadn't knocked this ink over. I don't know for my life now whether it's June or July or August these cases are down for."

"They'll let you know when the time comes," said Elworthy. "Anyhow, I'm off." And he took his hat again, and went to the railway station. The train for Manchester was waiting, but not ready to start. He ran the length of the train. Snugly ensconced in a first-class carriage, sat Keziah, and by her side was her uncle David, comforting her. Elworthy did not speak to her. He rushed and got his ticket, then

quietly stepped into the carriage as the train was moving off ; and taking her little hands in his, spoke not one word ; but they looked into each other's eyes, and were at rest.

Poor David, who was always being startled in one way or another, stared out of the window and blew his nose, with astonishing persistency considering he had not a cold.

CHAPTER LXII.

WIDE AS THE POLES ASUNDER.

AS Keziah particularly wished that her happy wedding should take place from the same house which had witnessed her ill-fated union to Hackbit, and as Mr. Rimmon eagerly welcomed any plan which allowed of his showing his newly-acquired furniture to a festive party, Dr. Elworthy was persuaded to appear at Jumley in the character of a bridegroom. But we should not dwell upon any incidents connected with this wedding, were it not that Madeline had been specially pressed to come with Mrs. Saltring from Langton, and had yielded after much solicitation, being quite ignorant that Rimpler resided at Mr. Rimmon's.

Even Rimplers do not know everything that concerns them ; and Silas happened never to hear Miss Orme's name as one of the invited guests, and failed to learn that she had actually arrived, for he had taken up his quarters temporarily at a hotel. He undertook as large a proportion as possible of the outside arrangements for the wedding, and had even refused to sit down at the wedding-breakfast, that he might see that everything was sent in in due order, and that there should be no delay with the carriages.

He had, however, dropped in after Keziah went upstairs, when the carriage was standing at the door : and had drunk to Keziah in her absence. It was at this point that Madeline and Mrs. Saltring suddenly went out of the room. No one thought anything of this ; at a wedding breakfast somebody not unfrequently goes out, at some stage or other, overcome ; and the general attention was drawn away from Madeline and Mrs. Saltring's exit, by the extraordinary expression of countenance Miss Dorcas put on at the entrance of Mr. Rimpler. There was no mistaking the look ; it was one of mingled hatred, malice, contempt, and defiance, which only some faces can combine in one expression. Every-

body saw the look, including Mr. Rimpler himself, who was clever enough to show no sign of it, but in consequence had to concentrate his attention in such a manner that he did not notice who went out of the room.

Mr. Rimpler had made a sort of programme for the entertainment of the wedding guests, at Mr. Rimmon's suggestion. After breakfast the whole party was to be driven to Angleton Park, the seat of Lord Jumley ; and at a pretty country inn on the outskirts of this park, a dainty lunch had been ordered for 2.30. The day was a glorious one, as if to favour this scheme ; and Keziah had scarcely been waved off before two carriages arrived for this expedition.

To every one's surprise, and to the great annoyance of some, Madeline begged not to be one of the party. Mrs. Saltring could say nothing in explanation, though she did her best, that would content the others. The drive would do Madeline good. Madeline must come ; and she, poor girl, with a face of alabaster, at length consented to go.

Mr. Rimpler had made inquiries about Madeline since encountering her at the Saltrings', and had recently wormed it out of some one who knew, that she was Mr. Rockingham's niece. He could hardly have told why, but this feature in the case made him appear to himself a worse villain. It was not then on the daughter of an ordinary music-hall singer that he had practised his fraud. Such persons were used to that sort of thing, he thought. But it was a lady, of noble descent, who had been sacrificed by a direct imposition on her own good nature and unselfishness.

Let it not be inferred, however, that Rimpler included any other than this one act of his life under the denomination of villainy ; the rest was all fair-play. Where there were fools, there must be knaves, he considered. It was a provision of nature which would improve the race, sooner or later, by sharpening the said fools on the knaves' grindstones. He had often argued this in his own mind, as an occupation in the dark, at his window. It is only nature, Mr. Rimpler would think ; everything is linked to everything else in nature. What a pest the flies would be, if it were not for the spiders to eat them up. So with many other disagreeable things, nature provided a check to their undue multiplication. The knaves were the check to the undue multiplication of fools. Then was it his fault that he had been chosen an instrument to this latter end ? Not at all. It was a merit rather. The human race had much to thank him for, and those like him. He had heard somewhere that physical qualities,

even organs, degenerated, and were ultimately lost under persistent disuse. The wits of even the wise, if not exercised to defeat the knaves, would thus degenerate, no doubt. He was a universal benefactor. He roused fools from their apathy, and exercised the wits of the wise : and in the process considerably sharpened his own. It was not for anything of this kind that he should call himself a villain. But Madeline had not been a fool. She had been caught by reason of her own goodness and unselfishness, and had been rendered wretched.

It was clear the past could not be altered by any amount of cursing and reviling. He took out his pocket-book, in which we have seen him make entries ; and wrote upon a leaf of it, in Italian, of which language he knew Madeline to be mistress : " Be at ease. I see you recognize me. I am too much ashamed of myself ever to press my acquaintance upon you. I send this only that you may be sure that I shall treat you as a stranger on all occasions when we may chance to meet, which is the least I can do to make reparation."

He had written this, and had folded it up and palmed it, when he found they were very near to the little inn ; and he began to mentally gather himself together to form some quick and undetectable plan of conveying his little note to Madeline's hand. In his usual cool fashion, he dismounted when the carriage stopped, and gracefully helped out Mrs. Saltring before Mr. Rimmon had even thought of alighting. He next gave his hand gravely to Madeline, who trembled a good deal. He appeared profoundly unconscious of this, and wore his gravest look. No detective could have imagined, if he had looked at Mr. Rimpler's countenance, that he had ever met this lady before ; much less would he have thought he was conveying something to her hand. Madeline knew it, however ; and had she not perceived by his face that he did not wish people to know they were anything but strangers, she would have been terrified. She could not let the note fall, and show there had been one ; so her hand closed upon it.

Madeline moved towards the window of the room into which the party was introduced, with the slip of paper folded between her fingers, and nobody noticed her. Her back was towards everyone ; and by a subtle instinct some women have, she felt she must take this opportunity of glancing at her paper. How could she guess, indeed, what grave importance might attach to her knowing its contents at once ?

Mr. Rimpler, who was engaged in giving directions to a waiter at the other end of the room, knew by her attitude that she was reading the

letter. She took her purse from her pocket, and put the folded paper into it, just as she was joined by Maud Towers.

At this juncture Miss Dorcas, feeling rather in the shade for a moment, made her way to these two, and, with an insolence some people show a mastery of, threw herself headlong into conversation by remarking that the Misses Langley's dresses (the minister's daughters, who had been bridesmaids) were a figure. "And that all comes," she added, "of their going to a cheap dressmaker, as can't fit, spoiling good stuff. If they'd have come to me, now, to make them, they should have looked fit to be seen."

Neither Maud nor Madeline answered; both looked extremely uncomfortable; and Miss Dorcas was not slow to see that she had made a mistake in addressing her remarks to them. She moved off without apology, but with a great jerk; and said to her sister-in-law, quite audibly, "that of all the stuck-up peacocks, that Mrs. Towers and Miss What's-her-name as came with Mrs. Saltring, were the tiptoppest. Can't hear half a word without sticking up their heads and looking at you as if they could slay you. I've no patience with proud peacocks."

Mrs. Rimmon touched her sister-in-law's sleeve by way of a hint that she was being overheard.

"I'm not ashamed of what I say," said Miss Dorcas, who was in a bad temper, owing to Mr. Rimpler's neglect of her. "If people will be proud peacocks, they must expect to be talked about."

Mr. Rimpler chanced to hear Dorcas's last remark; and instantly judging at whom it was levelled, gave Dorcas a look which would have appalled any one else. But she was notably reckless, and would have her fling, as she often said, if she died for it. With a sudden inspiration she looked Rimpler full in the face, and asked him when he had come to the throne; at which sally she was so much delighted that she laughed uproariously, attracting general attention to her. She should have waited for Rimpler's answer.

"I've never been in danger of coming to the throne; but I have been in danger of being dragged against my will to a certain altar several times. That is," he added, as if to make his meaning quite clear, "I should have been, had not the lady lacked all personal charm both of face and years, and manner and voice, and all the rest, having nothing in fact to drag with but her perseverance." And with this he turned away.

Dorcas was so overpoweringly angry, that the first thing she thought of—a common enough thought in the Black Country, too—was the

purchase of vitriol. But everybody else made an effort to pass the thing over ; and though all understood who the lady referred to was, there was not the least proof against Mr. Rimpler. He had not committed himself in any way.

The luncheon was a great success, and after it the party set out to walk in the park. Mr. Rimpler had noticed that Madeline was more comfortable than at first. He was glad of that ; and he now did his best to entertain Mrs. Saltring, who had fallen to his lot since they had come out. All at once, he beheld seated upon a bench a woman, with grey hair and a ragged shawl. On her arm was an old canvas bag ; and she looked miserable enough for anything. Mr. Rimpler for some reason could scarcely keep down his excitement. He said to Mrs. Saltring, quietly enough for all that, "We must not see a person look so wretched as that on so gay a day ;" and he fumbled in his pocket.

Mrs. Saltring, with pleased eyes, watched him go up to the woman, and bestow his willing alms upon her. She did not hear, however, the few words Mr. Rimpler spoke to the woman, or she might have seen an altogether different meaning in his act. In that brief moment he had made an arrangement with her to meet him at the tavern they had just quitted, the next day. He then passed on, as if nothing had occurred ; and everything went merrily, and everyone seemed sorry when it was time to return to Jumley.

CHAPTER LXIII.

CONNUBIAL AMENITIES.

THE sojourn abroad of Mr. and Mrs. Jubal Rimmon was considerably protracted ; and it was not until the first week in August that a Channel steamer, not too seaworthy, was nearing Newhaven, with a precious cargo indeed. The journey had been made by night, and the sea looked as blue as the sky overhead, and the white cliffs quite dazzling in the morning sunlight. Laura, with a peevish, discontented look upon her face, for which, perhaps, we ought to have some commiseration, since she had been suffering from sea-sickness, was regarding the pretty view from the deck of the steamer. Jubal, a thought thinner than when we last saw him, appeared to be making no effort at all to brighten the spirits of his partner, but puffed away at a big cigar quite spitefully.

At length a small creature in a blue shawl came on deck, and looked timidly about her. She was speedily followed, and her arm taken by a lady who appeared to be her mother. Laura, out of mere curiosity, watched the couple seat themselves on the side of the steamer; and then they turned their faces towards her.

"Jubal," she said, giving her lord a tug, "do you see who that is?"

"No, I don't; nobody I know."

"It's Lucy Beredith and her mother."

"Can't help it if it is," replied Jubal, continuing to puff.

"At least you might take a little interest in what I say."

"Other people take too much interest in what you say, for me to take much."

"I haven't the ghost of a notion what you mean," returned Laura, tossing her head. "But there are those Berediths. I wonder how it was we didn't see them when we came on board."

"I did see them at Saint Lazare," observed Jubal, with the same ill-natured tone and look; "and I saw them get into our train, and I saw them come on board."

"Then why couldn't you tell me?"

"A nice rage you'd get into, if I were always narrating to you everybody I saw."

"What a time we are getting in, when we are quite close to, and have been ever so long, to all appearance," remarked Laura, in answer to this.

"It is a horrible steamer. You ought to have looked after it better, as other gentlemen would do. But no one can expect you to be a gentleman."

"There's only one gentleman in the world, we know," retorted Jubal, "since Winterfold put in an appearance at Paris. And the devil knows how he found us out."

"I'm very glad he did," said Laura, crossly pulling a thread out of her glove. "It would have been dull enough without him. I suppose you didn't encourage him to come at all, did you? You didn't want it to be thought at the hotel that your friend was the son of a lord, did you, Jubal?"

She always called him Jubal when she was not on particularly good terms with him, which had been rather frequently of late.

"Are you going to speak to those Berediths?" Jubal had asked, when a sudden lurch of the ship sent him ignominiously into a sitting posture on the seat near his wife—he had been standing before.

Laura burst into a laugh, and several other passengers, who had come

on deck, were moved to smile also. Jubal's hat had flown off, and rolled with the movement of the vessel to the feet of the Berediths. He was very angry ; more angry with Laura than anyone else, for laughing at him. He was proud of her beauty, and was as really in love with her as his nature could be ; and he wished to be envied, and that the world should see that she was all his own. It appeared to him that her careless laughing at his misfortune would suggest to the minds of all who had seen it, that the young lady could not be very much in love with her husband. The casual observer of human nature is quick to notice and give their full value to indications of this kind. A wife—above all, a new wife, who is in love with her husband—would feel his being seen in a ridiculous or foolish position, in a sense doubly keen.

But Laura seemed rather to enjoy Jubal's discomfiture, as he unsteadily followed his truant headgear to the feet of the two ladies.

He apologised to them as he picked his hat up and placed it on his head ; and when he turned, he saw a young French girl, an article Jubal had purchased for his wife with his uncle David's money, in the act of receiving a spirited account of his misadventure from her mistress. This was too much for Jubal. He took in the situation at a glance, and did not go towards his wife, but remained sulkily where he was ; and the ship ploughed on through the water, and the white cliffs came nearer and nearer.

Jubal determined not to look after the luggage properly on landing, as the readiest means of avenging himself on his wife for her want of feeling ; and he became better tempered in prospect of this. One thing he meant to look after, and only one ; and that was his own bag lined with cigars, on which he meant to pay no duty. He likewise resolved to get drunk, which he knew Laura objected to, not on moral, but on artistic grounds. Jubal was an appendage of her own, and she always remembered this when he made a beast of himself, as she called it, though she appeared to have forgotten it just now, when Jubal fell. But then, after all, it was fate that had done that ; and Jubal chose to get drunk.

It has been seen that Laura made no step towards speaking to the Berediths. The Berediths, nevertheless, had recognized her, and had known her well enough not to expect her to accost them.

"Don't you think, mamma, that Laura is handsomer than ever?" Lucy said to her mother, with eyes fixed on the white cliffs they were every moment nearing.

"I certainly do," Mrs. Beredith acknowledged unwillingly. She would have been glad had the fact been less evident. She was angry with Laura.

"Don't you think it strange that we should have been on the same ship?"

"I should have stayed for the later ship if I had known they were coming over," said Mrs. Beredith rather sharply; "and if that's Keziah's brother, he's very much of her type."

Here Mrs. Beredith was wrong. But we all judge incorrectly of people against whom we have a preconceived opinion.

"Why doesn't he go to her?" remarked Lucy. "They don't appear to be on very good terms. Oh, mamma," she added, turning her wistful face away from the chalk cliffs, and towards her mother, "if I had married *him*, and were returning with him in this steamer instead of you, we should have been farther apart than we are now."

The mother sighed, and said nothing.

"I see it all differently now, mamma," went on Lucy. "I know it would never have done, and I want to tell Keziah so. I am sure he now thinks kindly of me. Had I married him, he would have hated me by now. And how much better to be separated from him as I am, than to have him hate me, and I be tied to him. I am sure, fate was kinder to me than I knew; and time is kind. When I last saw that shore, I was wishing I might never see it again; and now I am just longing to get back and see the old home. It was very kind of Gerald Harwyn to write so often."

Mrs. Beredith looked inquiringly at her daughter, as if not quite sure what this phrase meant, introduced suddenly as it was, and without apparent reason. Gerald Harwyn had written regularly to Mrs. Beredith, to make inquiries about Lucy, since they had left England, which they had done immediately after the events we have before described; and Lucy had certainly read his letters with evident pleasure. After all, that might be but natural. Any sympathy, if it be real, is acceptable in time of pain; and Mrs. Beredith had not attached much meaning to Lucy's gratification.

The steamer was at last close to the shore and entering the harbour, and Jubal, leisurely enough, advanced towards his wife and told her she might as well gather her traps together—that was the phrase he used—if she had left any in the cabin. They would be in in a minute.

"Perhaps you may go and inquire about them," rejoined Laura, saucily, "seeing you are so very steady on your feet, and we are so very near shore." The eyes of the little French maid twinkled at this sally; but she nevertheless said that Monsieur must not trouble himself to go

for the things ; she would go at once herself and see if there were anything of her mistress's left below.

"At any rate, Jubal," observed Laura, "you can look after the boxes, and see that some of them don't get carried off by somebody else."

"They'll see to that," replied Jubal, vaguely indicating he knew not whom. "I'm not going to bother about anything, except breakfast. An infernal wash of coffee they'll get for us, I know."

"But really," insisted Laura, gathering her cardinal wrap about her, and dropping from her pedestal of satire, and mounting that of anger, "You must look after the things, Jubal ; you know they will be lost, and things stolen out of them. You must stand by all the time they look in them, too, and see they don't take anything out of all those lovely things I have bought."

"Lovely things be hanged," said Jubal rudely ; "what the devil did you want to get so many things for ? It's through you buying so many things that we had to have new boxes to carry them in, and got charged for excess luggage."

"Well, we don't go to Paris every day," returned Laura indignantly.

"Uncle David may be very glad we don't," answered Jubal. "It has cost enough."

And, now, with a loud grating noise, and a little shudder, the steamer stopped : and then began the rush to land.

Jubal kept his word about the boxes ; and they were ruthlessly opened and turned over without any remonstrance from him. The only thing he took an interest in was his leather bag, which he opened himself and pushed towards the officer with a careless air, as much as to say, "You may look : there's nothing wrong with that." All it appeared to contain was a half-empty flask of brandy and a few toilet requisites. The officer pushed it back towards him with some impatience ; and Jubal, triumphant, marched away with his cigars to the crowded breakfast room, which looked uninviting enough. The proprietors well knew that the travellers must breakfast, at no matter what cost, and that they must take what was put before them, or else face the next part of the journey without anything. So the several tables were spread in no very attractive manner with food which would have been left untasted in a London restaurant. The passengers, who had for the most part been seasick, contented themselves with mild grumbling at the stewed tea and wretched coffee served to them at an extortionate price.

CHAPTER LXIV.

AN OMINOUS HOME-COMING.

AT Manchester great preparations had been made for the arrival of the bride and bridegroom. Everything that David Rimmon could think of, to add to the comfort of the young couple, had been purchased and arranged for, and David's hopes ran high; for was not there a chance that the boy he had adopted would go steadily to business, and sober down in every respect? And poor David thoroughly believed that this would be the case. It has been said that we believe what we wish to believe, and David's spirits had gone up during the prolonged wedding tour, and he had heaped belief upon belief, and hopes upon beliefs, until they all intermingled, and until he had attained a buoyancy as of present possession, all the more pleasant in contrast with his recent experience of failure and disappointment. As our travellers, weary, and not good-tempered, were nearing their destination, after having remained three days in London, David, anxious, redfaced, and important, made sharp and very unnecessary excursions from his front gate to his kitchen, and from the kitchen to the dining-room, where a meal was laid. The most perplexing thing of all to him in this situation was to find nothing that wanted doing. Everything was ready hours before it was needed.

In one of these little excursions to the garden gate, David espied a girl of no ordinary beauty, so it appeared to him, examining either himself or his house with considerable minuteness; and, thinking he might be of use to her in pointing out a house she was looking for, he asked her politely whose house she was in search of.

"Well, now really," she replied, advancing towards him with an assurance that astonished David not a little, "it's not a house I'm in search of, it's a person. I generally keep clear of the houses," she added with a light laugh.

She was now close to David, and his face became redder than ever, as he marked the manner in which she was gazing at him; and he simply looked at her without saying anything.

"You look," she went on, "as if butter wouldn't melt in your mouth; but if you've got money in your pocket, I could teach you to alter that. But perhaps you can tell me where Jubal Rimmon lives."

David felt as if he had been suddenly struck by lightning. He could no longer doubt what this woman was; and she was asking for Jubal.

To David this thing was so full of horror that he could not hide what he felt. Large drops of perspiration broke out on his brow, and he gasped out an appeal that she would go away, asking her if it were money she wanted, and praying her in such a manner to avoid his nephew, that it would have taken a harder heart than this girl really had to withstand it.

"Look here," she said, dropping her flippant tone, and adopting one with a good deal of womanly tenderness in it, "I won't take any money, and I won't see him again if I can help it. We're not all so bad as they call us," she added, "and I can't bear to see anyone look like you look now. Good-bye, sir." She moved away, but suddenly retracing her steps, she faced David, who was standing where she had left him, as if petrified.

"You go to church, sir?"

He made no response.

"You do, I know," she said, not caring whether he answered or not. "When you are there next, give a little prayer for me; it'll be the first and perhaps the last that is ever said for me." She turned at once without waiting for a reply, with hot tears on her cheeks, called there, not by any words David had spoken, but by reason of the integrity of the man, together with the kindheartedness that had shone out on his face while she had spoken with him. As she turned, a cab drove round the corner at a rapid rate. The girl was walking carelessly and fast, and before she or the driver could do anything to prevent it, the horse had thrown her down. The cab contained the returning travellers.

The girl struggled to her feet as the driver pulled his horse up. She was not hurt. The cab door was thrown open, and Jubal Rimmon stared at her, as she staggered to her feet, with a look of mingled wrath and amazement. But the knife, we recollect, had been to the grinder's and got sharpened, and the Jubal of the opening of our first volume is not the Jubal of to-day.

"Are you hurt, young woman?" he said, in a lordly, indifferent way, as if he did not know her in the least.

The girl, with a scornful look on her countenance, involuntarily glanced farther into the cab as she noticed this tone in Jubal, and met Laura's eyes fastened like a snake's upon her. She took in the situation, and said, in deep irony—

"People are not always clever enough to deceive the wife who is quick-witted." Then with a mocking laugh she passed on, not deigning to brush the dust from her garments, and wondered within herself how

it was that relations could be so opposite in nature. For she had gathered from a certain family resemblance, which could scarcely be called a likeness at all, that David was a relative of Jubal; besides which, Mr. Scratch, while in a drunken fit, had given Jubal's address to her, and had told her he lived with an uncle. She had reasons for encountering Jubal at all costs; but she abandoned the pursuit, for the time at least, so long as other things should not have banished David's look from her mind. And as the couple got out of the cab, and the girl turned the corner, Jubal muttered a curse between his teeth, and passed his uncle at the gate without so much as shaking hands, or noticing him in any way. Neither did he help Laura out of the cab, nor offer to pay the cabman, which indeed he would have been puzzled to do, as he possessed at that moment about three halfpence in hard cash.

David, inwardly blushing at his nephew's treatment of his new wife, tried to make up for it by extra politeness on his own part, and helped her out of the cab, in a manner worthy of Sir Charles Grandison, though we doubt if David Rimmon had ever heard of that gentleman; and it was quite a matter of course that he paid the cabman. It was plain to his eyes that Jubal had very speedily tired of his new toy, if he could treat her like that; and for his own part he could not in the least understand how any man should tire of such a beautiful creature as Laura.

They had scarcely entered the house when another cab drove up and stopped opposite The Chestnuts; and out of the window a small head with little twinkling black eyes peeped. Then the door opened, and a small personage with very much the air of a bantam cock stepped out, and directed the cabman as to the manner in which some of the boxes should be lifted.

"It's coming here," exclaimed David, pointing to the boxes, and inwardly dreading lest this should be some other applicant for Jubal Rimmon.

"Oh, yes," drawled Jubal, "I forgot to tell you, we couldn't get on without a maid for Laura, she having been used to one all her life," he added with a sneer.

This was a sudden shock for David, who had made no preparation for a third person. However, he meant to make the best of it, as he did of most things.

"All right," he replied, in his usual mild yielding fashion, "of course, quite right."

Laura, who had entered one of the rooms, turned back on hearing that her maid had arrived, and expressed her pleasure. The two ascended to the bedroom floor, and were so long upstairs that the cutlets got quite spoilt, and David dreaded—he knew not how much—sitting down to table, because everything was not perfection.

The ordeal of the tea-table and spoilt dishes was not destined to be gone through, however, by David, although it might have been preferable to the obstacle that prevented it. A telegraph messenger came up the garden path, as David looked through the window, ill at ease, with one of the ill-boding terra-cotta coloured envelopes in his hand. It is only the very fortunate who constantly have telegraphic messages of a pleasant description, and have therefore no dread of their contents at sight of the envelope. David was not one of the fortunate ; and having received the telegram from the hand of his servants, he made two or three futile attempts to open it.

“Hang it, uncle,” said Jubal, “any one would think you had betted on the wrong horse, and were receiving the notice of it. Why don’t you open it?”

David, as if in a dream, opened his telegram, and his features worked with evident excitement as he read. It was from James Elworthy, Leamington, and ran as follows :—“Come at once. Keziah dangerously ill. Have brought her home.”

Jubal, a cigar in his mouth, swaggered up to his uncle, and impudently took the telegram from him.

“What a blessed fool that Elworthy is,” was his comment.

David, without a remark, passed out of the room, and in a dazed way took his hat and walked off.

Has the reader ever seen a dog in the first stage of hydrophobia rushing on in a direct line, in its search for water, which it will nevertheless refuse to taste if it finds? It was in something of this manner that David Rimmon walked towards the station. He passed nobody who did not turn and look after him. If he had thought of the spoilt cutlets they would have seemed as some small thing that he had been concerned about years before. Keziah dangerously ill! Keziah brought home! In that sharp walk to the station, as much as he had known of Keziah’s life crowded into his mind ; and more especially instances of her tenderness to himself were vividly in his consciousness. All the world except Keziah had been far-off from him. There had been only this one being, in a world so thickly populated, for him to think of with affection and no

anxiety, with admiration and almost worship. There had been one other towards whom his soul had gone out, but it had been his duty not to think of her. Keziah was left to him to be the recipient of his full heart, overflowing with affection, yet finding but this single object. Strange that this should be so, while thousands in a cruel world would forfeit all to be loved as David Rimmon could love.

At the station David hurriedly asked if the last train to take him into Manchester was gone—to take him in he meant in time for the last to Leamington. No, there was a train in now. He flung down some money recklessly, and went away without the change. He was going to Keziah; Keziah, who was dangerously ill.

While David was hurrying towards Leamington, his nephew, and his niece by marriage, were turning their noses up in a style that would have given him considerable uneasiness, at the half-cold viands; and from sharp language and cross looks they relapsed into silence. Keziah's sudden illness aroused no sympathy in them. Nevertheless, it was a peg to hang a dispute upon.

"Upon my word," observed Laura, "you are an affectionate and tender-hearted brother, to sit there stuffing yourself like a pig, when you have just heard that your sister's at the point of death."

"Indeed," retorted Jubal, superciliously. "It's the first time I ever heard you express any interest in Keziah, though, no doubt, in keeping with your usual all-round good nature, you've always taken the greatest interest in her inwardly. Pray oblige me by not likening me so often to such an uninteresting animal as a pig. My ambition doesn't lie in that direction."

"I liken you to one because you remind me of one. In company you affect all the neatness of a gentleman. In private you emulate your ancestors. I prefer the company of the gentleman to that of a metamorphosed collier."

"I declare, Laura," burst out Jubal, colouring deeply, and the muscles of his face standing out firm and evident, "it will be the worse for you if you get trying this game on. You may go just a trifle too far. By heaven, you'll make me silence that tongue of yours for ever, one of these days."

"I wish I had a witness to that speech," said Laura, bitingly, affecting to be more at ease than she was, for Jubal looked very wrathful indeed; and as if in answer to this, the lady's-maid presented herself in a stealthy and cat-like manner, and looked at this young lord of creation with her

small serpent-like eyes, her cheeks of an unearthly pallor, and her coils of black hair fixed in a kind of turban on the top of her head.

"Annette," said Laura, in her own spiteful manner, "did you hear your master say anything as you came in?"

"I have no wish to make myself involved," replied the lady's-maid stonily.

"He said he would silence my tongue for ever, one of these days. Did you hear that?"

Annette had not heard, but she decided to pretend she had ; therefore she remained silent.

CHAPTER LXV.

STRAINED TOO FAR.

SORROW and death heal estrangements which time unaided could not cure. After all, when we speak of the healing hand of time in reference to trouble, ill-feeling, losses, it may not be the passing of day after day, of week after week, the mere passing, that makes the difference. It is rather the events which the weeks bring with them, silent victors demanding for themselves absorbing attention, for the time at least. Yet, without lapse of time, a single event is sometimes strong enough to heal what threatened to be a life-long feud.

Perhaps only those who are themselves mothers will understand how bitterly Mrs. Beredith felt towards Keziah. Yet, hearing from Gerald Harwyn, immediately on her return home from the Continent, that he had a telegram from Elworthy, telling him to make preparations to receive his wife, who appeared very ill, Mrs. Beredith at once began to relent towards Keziah, and unconsciously to frame excuses for her. Keziah happy, Keziah victorious, she could be angry with. Keziah broken down, incapable of enjoying her victory, perhaps dying, and about to forfeit everything, found a place in Mrs. Beredith's womanly heart. She seemed to forget for the moment her daughter's position ; for Lucy was the first to hear the lamentation that broke from her after she had learnt the news. Lucy, for her part, who had long since forgiven Keziah, now felt piqued with her mother. It was all very well to play the part of a forgiving angel herself, but it was a *rôle* she did not care to see her mother play so readily. So far was Lucy human, though the poor child had scarcely a

fault. Lucy therefore watched her mother's preparations to go to Dr. Elworthy's, with a silence which might have spoken volumes, had Mrs. Beredith been less absorbed. As it was, Mrs. Beredith with her own hands prepared the room that was to receive Keziah, and awaited her arrival as if a fixture in the establishment. She had ascertained from Gerald that no one of Keziah's relatives had as yet been informed of her illness ; so there would be no woman present but herself, except the servants.

"But no one is needed here," Gerald said. "I have no doubt at all Elworthy will nurse her himself ; and," he added, with evident hesitation, "do you not think that, after what has occurred, Mrs. Elworthy might find it too much for her, in her present condition, to see you."

"Oh, nonsense," said the lady, hotly, looking at him with the special scorn older people adopt towards those who are younger than themselves, and have any pretensions to superior knowledge. "Men know nothing at all about that, and I know Keziah much better than you do. It will do her good to see me, and to know we are friends again. She has not a bit of resentment in her."

"Of course," said Gerald coldly, "it is not my business." He was thinking of Lucy, and resented Mrs. Beredith's coming.

Mrs. Beredith tossed her head just a little, sniffed in the air, after the manner of people who could say a great deal and choose to keep silent ; and installed herself.

It was evening, when a carriage stopped at the door, and Mrs. Beredith trembled as she thought that within a few minutes she must see Keziah, and must realise how much she was changed. Dr. Elworthy had not said what was the matter with her, but she must be very ill indeed for him to bring her home thus ; of that at least she felt sure.

The hall door was opened. Mrs. Beredith could not go out, but stood behind the door of the room in which she was, trembling as if something were about to break loose upon her. She heard Elworthy's voice, harsh and impatient to everyone except Keziah ; and the contrast was so great when he spoke a pitying word to her, and when he addressed a remark to any of the others, it might have been two different persons who spoke.

The footsteps passed from the hall up the staircase, and Mrs. Beredith knew that Keziah was being carried up to her room ; yet she remained as if glued to the spot. She had lighted a fire in Keziah's room ; and she was sure that she heard Elworthy make some angry remark about it.

She must have remained half-an-hour, stationed in the same spot, when she heard a footfall on the stairs. She knew the step well: it was Elworthy's. He entered the room where she was, and where some refreshment was laid. He turned a haggard and angry face on her. She tried to speak, but the words would not come. She felt as she remembered to have done in a nightmare, when she had been in great danger, and could not even utter a cry.

Elworthy sat down without remark, and commenced to eat, not like a man, but like an automaton. He looked curses when he happened to glance her way; yet he was not specially angry with Mrs. Beredith. He was at war with the world. He was at war with the fate that had dashed the ripe fruit from his lips. Mrs. Beredith was not that fate, but she was part of the universe that beheld his misery, and he resented her presence.

When he had finished eating, he rose to go, and just observed, as if addressing a stranger who had chanced to be there—

"Be sure you do not bang the door when you go out."

He left the room, and went upstairs. Gerald had remained with Keziah while Elworthy snatched a meal; and he found him bathing her head, which was once more shorn of its curls, with eau-de-Cologne and spirits of wine. The room was almost absolutely dark. The fire was screened. Rugs had been laid all along the landing, that no footfall might be heard. Gerald was about to make some remark in a low tone, but Elworthy impatiently signed to him to be silent. He passed once more out of the room, and summoned his housekeeper. He led her to his wife's room, and bade her stay there without speaking a word, while he and Mr. Harwyn consulted in another room. The housekeeper would have fallen back with terror on entering the room, had she not used strong self-control. Keziah's eyes were glaring at her like two great suns out of the darkness, and she accosted her the instant she entered the room.

"Ah," she said, rapidly, twitching her fingers incessantly, "I told you what it would be. What did you bring me for? Lock, it's coming again; take me away first."

"Where from?" asked the housekeeper, who had forgotten her master's injunction.

"Can't you see it?" replied Keziah. "It's buried cities, and the burning lava pours down upon my head."

The housekeeper grew desperately frightened.

"That isn't the worst," went on Keziah. "He forsook me there, and left me to my fate. Now wasn't it unkind? We were only just married."

"Oh, good lack-a-day," said the housekeeper, wringing her hands, "but you're mistaken about that."

Keziah, not heeding her, rambled on without rest, in a manner that would tire any hearer to listen to. "It wasn't kind, after pretending to care for me so, to go and leave me here on this terrible mountain." Then, in a confidential tone, she continued, "I ought to have died, I suppose. It would have been all right then, and I should have been at rest ; but I can't die. I am never to die. I know I shall never die. Look here, whoever you are, ask them not to ring those bells ; there can be no need for it. How strange ! What a terrible noise this makes ! I never saw waggons and horses going up a mountain before. They make more noise than the coal carts in line with the jagers."

In the meantime the unhappy husband and Gerald were discussing Keziah's case.

"When did you first notice anything strange in her?" Gerald asked.

"I thought she was not natural on our wedding-day, but I hoped she'd be all right when we got away. She seemed gloomy, and complained of a weight on her head and a tendency to fall forward if she stooped the least bit. She described it as top-heaviness."

"The brain is terribly congested," said Gerald. "There's no use in having further advice, is there? These cases always require the same treatment. There's nothing but quiet and the nursing we shall give." As Gerald spoke he looked into his companion's face, and saw such agony in it that he involuntarily seized the clenched hand that was fixed to Elworthy's side, and grasped it with such brotherly tenderness that Elworthy, who was frightfully overstrung, flung himself into his chair, weeping bitterly. His grief was terrible to witness, and Gerald felt his heart ache for him. He placed his arm on Elworthy's shoulder, and fell to caressing him as he might have done a woman.

By Elworthy's suggestion, Gerald telegraphed for his sister, who arrived next day. Maud entered the house by the surgery door by mere accident, and was met by her brother on the threshold. He suddenly, at the sight of her became very red ; and Gerald had one of those transparent complexions on which the slightest tinge of pink shows conspicuously. This did not strike Maud as being at all remarkable, till she noticed in the surgery a neat little lady in brown, whose colour was rivalling Gerald's at that moment. Maud merely glanced at her, and took her for a patient uncomfortable in the presence of the doctor, and was going to pass through the surgery, when Gerald in a hesitating

manner suddenly introduced her to the little brown lady. "My sister, Mrs. Towers—Miss Beredith," he said.

Maud stretched out her hand and grasped Lucy's, that trembled and fluttered like a little bird in hers. "I am so glad to meet you," Maud said. "I have heard much good of you, my dear. Is this the way, Gerald," she added, "or perhaps Miss Beredith will show me?"

"I was just going," stammered Lucy, very ill at ease.

"Oh, don't go yet," said Gerald impatiently. "I'll show Maud. I want to speak to you."

Lucy, left alone, cast frightened glances at the strange objects, the bottles and jars, and the ghastly prints of anatomical subjects upon the wall; she was half afraid of a skeleton that occupied one corner.

It did not appear to have taken Gerald long to show Maud upstairs, for he came back very quickly, and had not lost the red colour upon his face; and Lucy's returned at sight of him.

"What did you want me for?" Lucy asked, in her gentle voice.

"Ah!" said Gerald, taking a bottle down from a shelf and critically smelling at a cork, "I wanted to ask you how you liked my sister."

The surgery door here opened, admitting a little boy who called for "the mixture and powders."

"Whom did you say it was for?" Gerald asked, impatiently and roughly.

"Mother," replied the small boy, staring all the time at Miss Beredith.

"Damn—— you," said Gerald; "why can't you say her name?"

The boy didn't look much taken aback by this; he was probably used to being sworn at. But Lucy did look very much shocked, and marked her displeasure by quitting the surgery with a cool bow.

Gerald could have bitten his tongue out, but that could not alter the case. Lucy had gone; and he couldn't go racing after her. She would think him—he didn't know what she would think him—probably she would think nothing about him any more. The mixture was not ready. Gerald began to mix it with unsteady fingers, and unconsciously pulled down the wrong bottles, and, finally, wasted two or three bottlefuls, through not having noticed how much opium he put in. The little boy, patient, stood looking at the wonders of the surgery, and no doubt thought it was all right that the mixture should be so long in making, at least if he thought at all. The mixture being at last prepared, Gerald handed it over, together with a sixpence for himself, which was a con-

science offering, and which would probably have had the effect of making all the little boys in Leamington come to be sworn at, if they could have understood the case.

In the meantime, Maud had found her way through the darkness of the room to Keziah's side, and sat down beside her without rustle or sound of any kind. Keziah, nevertheless, with great strained eyes, in which there was no astonishment, only fixed wildness, watched her seat herself, and immediately addressed her. Maud was startled to hear herself called by her name.

"You see, Maud," Keziah began, as if she were continuing a conversation that had been commenced at some other time, "you may all of you be sorry, but you can't help me away from here. He need not have left me here; he could have done something else. But it seems natural that you and I should be together, doesn't it?" she babbled on. "We have borne a great deal together, haven't we? Come, we must try to move under that shelter; see, the projecting rock. One step; the lava, it's coming again," and Keziah began to spring forward in the bed. Her husband, who had been in the shadow, came at once, and tenderly put his arms about her, speaking to her in tones so full of pity and affection, they might have moved the hardest heart. But Keziah, with a strength quite astonishing, repulsed him with both her hands. "There is but one I love, and he has left me to die miserably here. No one else shall come near me. Yes," she went on, with a weary smile, "I would rather die by his hand, or his neglect, than live by the help of some other. Come, Maud, let us go away." Then in a sharp whisper, distinctly audible, "Don't let that man come near me again; I loathe him. Who is he?"

Elworthy in his experience as a doctor could find nothing new in this sort of thing. Yet he felt that it was entirely new to him; and he inwardly prayed, as his heart bled, that, should his darling be spared to recover and be his own Keziah again, the suffering he was now passing through might make him tenderer both to patients and their friends. As he sat there he recalled scenes which had moved him little at the time, and faces watching by bedsides hearing like things to those he heard now stood out and haunted him reproachfully in the darkness of this room for the manner in which he had gone on his way and forgotten them.

Two days later, David Rimmon was sent for, because Keziah had taken up a new cry; she continually asked to see her uncle. When

David arrived, very late indeed, and by instinct went straight upstairs to Keziah's room after taking off his boots, he placed himself at her bedside, silently, like one of the genii of the Arabian Nights who has been summoned and who appears without even a "Here am I." Mrs. Beredith was taking her turn in Keziah's room when this occurred; she and Maud were taking the nursing in turns. She guessed who David was, but David in the gloom could not see Mrs. Beredith. He believed himself alone with Keziah.

Keziah, restlessly moving her head from one side to another, staring into the gloom with the great eyes that would never blink, clutching with her two little hands from time to time at her shaved head, and incessantly muttering, at last dropped one little hand on David's, which was resting upon the quilt, then convulsively moved her eyes towards the hand she had touched. "That is uncle David's hand," she said, in a more natural voice.

"It is, it is, my darling," said David, beginning to rain tears in great splashes upon her hand, that was so hot. "At your service for ever, my lamb," he went on, so gently he might have been born a refined gentleman instead of a collier's son.

Mrs. Beredith came with fresh cloths, dipped in spirits of wine and eau-de-Cologne, and put them on the poor girl's burning head. David had his head bowed over the little hand, so hot and restless, and did not notice her. Keziah had let her head rest on that side of the pillow nearest her uncle, and said, softly—

"I'm not afraid, now you are come. He left me here to die." Then the lids closed over the strained eyes, and as her husband, worn and anxious, softly entered the room, he saw that Keziah was asleep.

"God be praised," he said to himself. "She will recover now."

It was two hours before Keziah opened her eyes again, and David was still there, and his hand was clasping hers. Elworthy pointed to some beef tea, and Mrs. Beredith carried it to Keziah. Strange freak of brain-maladies, that during them those best beloved are sometimes abhorred. Elworthy, who loved Keziah better than his life, and whom Keziah loved as few women ever have loved, this Elworthy was the only one Keziah would not allow to approach her in this illness. If he administered either medicine or nourishment, she was seized at once with frenzy; and all those little tender offices, to have performed which would have made his lot less hard, he was obliged to forego. Keziah knew the others; him she loved she took for a stranger. Yet he kept every vigil

with her, and out of sight in the darkness of her room, he sat for hours behind a curtain, and prayed for her, and wept for her.

Mrs. Beredith at some of these times would put her arms round him as if he had been her son, and laying his head upon her bosom, mingled her tears with his, till he would look at her at last and whisper the invariable phrase—"As one whom his mother comforteth."

At nine o'clock next morning, as Maud passed the surgery door on her way to breakfast, she heard her brother in conversation with some one; it was the little lady in brown.

"I could have blown out my brains for it," she heard her brother say, "the minute after; and if you had never come again to inquire as usual, I should have done it. I tried to write to you two or three times to tell you how sorry and ashamed I was, but I couldn't."

"You needn't mind about my opinion," replied a gentle voice. "It can be of no moment to any one."

"But it's everything to me," said Gerald, raising his voice; "everything, Lucy, because you are everything, more than everything to me. With you, I could be happy anywhere, under any circumstance. Without you, I would rather die than face it. Oh Lucy, give me one little word of hope, and make me happier than man ever yet was."

Maud, who had been involuntarily transfixed, now moved away with a hot blush on her own cheek. Yet she was pleased; and when Maud was pleased she had a way of being extremely kind to other people. She went into the dining-room and gave David his breakfast, with a lavish kindness of voice and manner that would have thrown David into the third heaven of delight had not Keziah been ill.

When Keziah had slowly crept back into life, Lucy Beredith, who unceasingly made inquiries after her progress, was admitted one morning to see her. At mention of Lucy, a little flush came into Keziah's cheek, and she eagerly looked for her coming.

Maud was in the room when Lucy came in with her gentle step, trembling visibly. She advanced towards her in a moment, and taking her by the hand, led her to Keziah's bedside.

"Kizzy, my pet," she said in a caressing tone she had never used to Keziah until her illness, "I must introduce this little lady to you afresh." Something trembled on Keziah's lips, but no sound came.

"She is soon to be my little sister," said Maud. "Yes, it is quite true, you needn't look surprised. She is going to be Gerald's wife,"

Tears now welled into Keziah's eyes as she fixed a glad look on Lucy, who in her turn flung her arms about Keziah and began to weep. It was the knowledge that Lucy was sure to act in this way that has caused her banishment from the sick-room up to this time.

"Oh, Kizzy," said Lucy, "how much I thank you that you did not let me do that wicked thing. It was so brave and so good of you, and saved us all so much misery, and it would all have been such a mistake. I am sure I mistook myself all along; I had never been in love, Kizzy, I know that now. I only thought it. I am so easily fond of anyone who is kind and good to me. I mistook it, I suppose; but I do thank you." And now the hard part of her task being over, she raised a glad and tear-stained face and said merrily, "Now, Kizzy, I am only waiting for you to get well enough to come to the wedding."

"Maud," said Keziah, in her old impulsive tone, "I am too happy to stay in bed. Can't I be dressed to-morrow? I am sure I am quite well."

"We will see about that," replied Maud, pursing up her lips, and nodding to Lucy to go. Lucy had to hug Keziah over and over again before this could take place, declaring she was never so happy in her life. During this scene, Elworthy came into the room to see, as he said, that his patient was not being ill-used: and at the sight of him a lovely light came into Keziah's eyes, which only he ever called up. He silently sat down beside her and took her little hand, and the two looked into each other's eyes as if they could never tire.

"Come, Lucy," said Maud, "we are *de trop*," and they left the room.

When they reached the bottom of the stairs Lucy's eyes involuntarily turned towards the surgery, and she hesitated.

"No," said Maud, "he is not there this time." Lucy blushed. "But I must tell you, Miss Lucy," Maud went on with her first finger held up in a lecturing style, "you might have made all your inquiries by coming to the front door in an ordinary way instead of always to the surgery."

"Oh, Mrs. Towers," rejoined Lucy, in an alarmed voice, "do you think it wasn't proper of me? You see, I thought," she went on, blushing more deeply, "I should get to know more correctly if I saw either Dr. Elworthy or—Gerald."

"Oh, you are an artful little creature," said Maud. "Love will find out a way, I suppose. But if you don't learn to call me Maud, in a sisterly fashion, I shall report this proceeding to Mrs. Beredith, and she wouldn't treat it so lightly as I have done."

Lucy didn't understand Maud's manner yet, and the tears came into her eyes at this rebuke. Maud passed her arm round her in a sheltering way, and, kissing Lucy's cheek, said, "There, don't be a ridiculous little puss. Don't you think I would hail any chance that won you for my brother?"

Lucy was comforted; and as it was her way to pass quickly from tears to sunshine, and from sunshine to tears, she said, with a beaming countenance, "I do hope Kizzy will be downstairs soon."

"Why, I wonder?" said Maud, teasingly.

"Because I love her," Lucy replied.

"And for no other reason?" suggested Maud. "Ah, I cannot resist teasing you. But you are quite right to be so happy. Make the most of it; it only comes once in a lifetime. To some it never comes at all." And she gave a little sigh. Her thoughts had flown to the Bowdon cemetery. Kizzy was getting better, and she was longing to get back to be within reach of that mound of earth.

Lucy, as she went tripping along the street on her way home, thought how wonderfully Maud had got over her husband's death. She did not realise that spiritual wounds, like physical ones, must be covered up.

CHAPTER LXVI.

MR. RIMPLER'S EXCURSION.

THE advent of Jubal among the Springwoods, on the morning but one after his return, was hailed with delight.

"Glad to see you, Rimmon," said Springwood the elder, with a majestic wave of the hand. "We shall be happy if you will join our board."

"He's never happy to see people join our board, unless it's to his own interest," said the son, who had just quarrelled with his father. "I guess the governor wants you to cash up, Rimmon."

Jubal was engaged in speaking to the ladies, and did not hear the last remark distinctly, for which reason Springwood the younger repeated it as Jubal seated himself. Jubal, having had little money as a boy, was most ambitious to be considered "flush," as he termed it, now he was a man; so he remarked, with the air of a landed proprietor, "You shall have it to-morrow, Springwood. I'll bring it myself and go to the play afterwards. I would pay you now, only a fellow can't go about without

anything in his pocket, you know ; so if it will be all the same to you, I'll bring it in to-morrow."

It would be all the same to the Springwoods, who, nevertheless, would much have preferred to see the cash then.

"Have you heard from Denleigh?" Jubal asked, having dismissed the other affair, "or from Harris?"

"Off and on," was the reply.

"Winterfold is in Paris, you know," said Jubal ; "we saw him the other day."

Springwood father winked at Springwood son. As a matter of fact, these two had just encountered Winterfold, not a street distant from where they were, and had private reasons for not apprising Jubal of the fact.

When the party rose to go to the theatre for rehearsal, Jubal went home, and was astonished to find a gentleman in company with his wife. It was our old acquaintance Mr. Rimpler, who had come over, he asserted, because he wished, if possible, to re-establish friendly relations between a father and a son.

Mr. Rimpler soon perceived that by this beginning he had made a false step. It was quite certain, from the manner in which Jubal curled his lip and tossed his head, that his ambition did not lie in that direction. The wily Rimpler instantly threw out another bait.

"A mere figure of speech," he said, throwing a kind of derision upon his last words. "But it might just be to your advantage that the property should come to you."

Jubal pricked up his ears at this, for he was conscious that before long, possibly very soon, he should need another peg to hang his fortunes on than his uncle. He was convinced that this Mr. Rimpler must have some hidden reason for presenting himself thus in the light of a friend ; and he did not desire Rimpler to suppose that he was the only way to that most desirable end of which he had spoken.

"I thank you greatly, Mr. Rimpler," said he, sneeringly, "for the interest you take in this matter ; but it is just possible that I have means of my own, without help from you, for directing my father's property into the right channel."

Yet while he spoke, he felt there was a hidden power in the small eyes, with all the flash and hardness of steel in them, that were fastened on him. Such a look, he knew, had always something to be feared at the back of it.

"Very well," responded Mr. Rimpler, rising with a smile of a demon on his face, "I came willing to make terms with you. The time for that has gone by. I now feel myself at liberty to use any information I may have about you and your proceedings, in any way that may seem to me good. I have the honour to wish you good-day."

Jubal at this moment would gladly have recalled Mr. Rimpler had such a course been consistent with his pride. Jubal was himself playing at the diabolical game of shooting in the dark, and knew enough of its workings to dread the result of the words Mr. Rimpler had just uttered. As for Laura, she felt, for the time at least, enough fear to keep her quiet, for she was not at all assured, now that Mr. Rimpler was gone, and with him her confidence, that the business she and he had transacted together before Jubal's arrival, might not in some way be guessed. She took refuge in absolute silence, and pretended to read. Jubal, for his part, had a weighty matter upon his mind that demanded instant attention, quite independent of the questions Mr. Rimpler's visit called up. He had promised to pay Springwood the next day. He must resort to a plan he had already tried, and with success. He would not have been quite so comfortable about this, had he imagined, which he did not, that his method of obtaining ready cash was known to Mr. Rimpler. This was nevertheless the case, for that gentleman had been informed by a mutual acquaintance, not too nice upon points of honour, of Jubal's little process, although the gentleman in question had omitted to state at the same time that it was he who had suggested it to Jubal. It was this knowledge that had induced Mr. Rimpler, in his character of possessor of secrets, to pay Jubal a visit.

Mr. Rimpler had had another purpose in coming, compared with which, the one he assigned as his reason was but insignificant. It had been a growing belief with him for a long time that Jubal had possessed himself of the missing papers belonging to his father, the loss of which had hung ever since like a sword over Joshua Rimmon's head. And as the fates usually favoured Mr. Rimpler's proceedings, they did not forsake him in this. He had found Laura in one of those spiteful moods in which she would have sold her dearest friend. He had obtained from her, almost with ease, the papers he desired; for Laura had made herself mistress of every secret possession of Jubal's long ere this; and he had not a lock proof against her keys. There was this great difference between Silas Rimpler and Laura Rimmon. Silas would stop short at nothing provided he was to be a gainer by the transaction;

23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 849, 850, 851, 852, 853, 854, 855, 856, 857, 858, 859, 860, 861, 862, 863, 864, 865, 866, 867, 868, 869, 870, 871, 872, 873, 874, 875, 876, 877, 878, 879, 880, 881, 882, 883, 884, 885, 886, 887, 888, 889, 890, 891, 892, 893, 894, 895, 896, 897, 898, 899, 900, 901, 902, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907, 908, 909, 910, 911, 912, 913, 914, 915, 916, 917, 918, 919, 920, 921, 922, 923, 924, 925, 926, 927, 928, 929, 930, 931, 932, 933, 934, 935, 936, 937, 938, 939, 940, 941, 942, 943, 944, 945, 946, 947, 948, 949, 950, 951, 952, 953, 954, 955, 956, 957, 958, 959, 960, 961, 962, 963, 964, 965, 966, 967, 968, 969, 970, 971, 972, 973, 974, 975, 976, 977, 978, 979, 980, 981, 982, 983, 984, 985, 986, 987, 988, 989, 990, 991, 992, 993, 994, 995, 996, 997, 998, 999, 1000

Laura did her meanest actions with scarcely a thought of personal gain, that is, so far as the golden calf went; though in its proper place, far from ignoring its attractions, she showed herself remarkably skilled in winning it to herself. She would stop at nothing to satisfy a moment's spite. She would have sacrificed any one in the world for this. But she would equally have sacrificed herself. Silas Rimpler would have laughed at that idea. They resembled each other in one other thing: vain regret was pretty equally unknown to either.

Silas, in his conversation with Laura, had begun by insinuating. The only thing she cared to know at this moment was that the loss of these papers would cause the greatest consternation to Jubal; and they were in Mr. Rimpler's pocket some little time before Jubal came in.

Mr. Rimpler did not immediately return to Jumley. Strange to narrate, his destination was the Springwoods'.

Opinions differ as to whether it is wise to have many irons in the fire; to argue the question is of little use where people have no choice but to have many irons in the fire. Few men, however, could manage many irons so well as Mr. Rimpler could. It might be said, as a figure of speech, that on his way from Bowdon to the Springwoods' his mind was entirely engaged in at least three objects. One object, as the reader may be quite sure, was the ultimate reversion to himself of all Mr. Rimmon's possessions. Mr. Rimpler had calculated on this, on first identifying himself with Mr. Rimmon, as an assured fact. He thought, moreover, that it could be managed without the exercise of any special skill on his part; but in this the schemer had been mistaken. He had been able to extort from Mr. Rimmon, in addition to his own salary, little beyond the promise of a legacy; and Mr. Rimpler, resembling a famous murderer of whom De Quincey writes, always went in for wholesale business. He would not have a legacy among others; he would have everything. Of course he was sure of obtaining the property, only it was annoying to have any trouble about it. He had not yet used the weapon of threats. The thing he had wished to secure was, that Jubal should not be in a position to threaten as heavily as he; and this he had accomplished with little enough trouble to satisfy even himself.

It was after midnight, and Mr. Rimpler stood in the street watching the stage exit. Many passed him on their way out without noticing him at all; and he noticed no one until the manager and proprietor himself appeared. When he came out, Mr. Rimpler, after the manner of one who has met someone by appointment, linked his arm in

Springwood the elder's, and, without ceremony, went to his apartments with him.

"Where have you hidden yourself all this time?" said Springwood, looking with more astonishment than warmth upon Mr. Rimpler.

"It has never been my way to tell anything, however trivial, unless there was an occasion for it," Rimpler replied.

"That's true, at any rate," returned Springwood. "And to tell you another piece of truth, you are not quite so welcome as you seem to have taken it for granted you would be."

"Nevertheless," rejoined Rimpler, with a smile, "my visit will not be unpleasant to you that I am aware of, this time, for it happens to be an extremely simple matter I've come about, and one that could scarcely prove annoying to you or to anybody. I have come to tell you that I have seen Nancy."

"You have?" exclaimed Springwood in astonishment.

"I told you that it was my wish not to know what was done with the child."

"Yes, you did," said Springwood, with emphasis. "And we haven't told you."

"But I have changed my mind. I particularly want to trace the child, and I am most anxious to know if what Nancy has told me is true. She says it was a collier's wife she confided it to, called Barker. Is that the truth? And is it true that she lived at Jumley?"

"Yes, that's quite true."

They were standing on the threshold of Springwood's apartments.

"Then I will bid you good-night," said Mr. Rimpler marching away without even shaking hands.

"Can it be that he has a father's heart in his bosom after all?" said Springwood theatrically, when he had disappeared.

CHAPTER LXVII.

JUBAL DETECTED.

DAVID RIMMON had been absent at Leamington about a fortnight, when Jubal came home one afternoon to Laura with a face of ghastly pallor. "Laura," he said, closing the door of the drawing-room, in the tone of a man who must speak to somebody, even though it will be to one who will not sympathise. "Laura, I'm in an infernal mess."

She did not answer with one of her piquant, stinging phrases. If Jubal were in an infernal mess, she was ; at least she would have to bear it. She listened, that was all. Jubal looked very ill, and drank from a decanter that was on the table, and stared in a bewildered fashion.

"I've got caught in a trap," he said. "There's only one chance for me. I've sent a telegram to my Uncle David."

"For goodness' sake tell me what it is," said Laura, blanched in her turn.

Jubal blurted out his next words like a man who does not simply turn a tap on, but pulls it out boldly "I've been helping myself to his cash, that's it, for this long time past. It wouldn't have come to light at all, if I hadn't gone in for such a big lot this time. They've paid all the other cheques without any question ; but when I went to cash this one, this morning, the clerk went and talked to somebody else, and they looked at the cheque with a magnifier, and kept comparing it with some others ; and at last, he just stepped up and said, 'Mr. Franks will come down and see Mr. Rimmon about it.' And I, like a fool, said he was away from home, and said where he was. And they said, 'Well, Mr. Franks would run down by the evening train, and see him,' at that cursed Elworthy's. So I telegraphed to uncle when I got away, telling him that the business he would hear of that evening was my doing, and begging him to forgive me ; and he's such an infernal ass, he's sure to do it, unless his confounded honesty goes against it ; so now you know our chances. It shuts up everything here, of course. We shall have to go somewhere else, Laura ; and I shall make my father cash up for us."

With this he left Laura and went to his bed-chamber. He thought the tide had come to the flood with him, as regarded his throwing his father into consternation, and possessing himself of what he chose of his ill-gotten gains. In three minutes he came downstairs in a towering passion, and, darting into the room with an oath, clutched Laura by the throat, and glared in her face as though he would have murdered her. "They have been stolen," he hissed, "and it is you who have done it, you mean, deceitful, thieving wretch."

Jubal did not seem to think for a moment that these epithets might be equally applicable to himself.

"You have ruined us both, you she-devil." He flung her from him, brutally kicked her, left the room, and went and got drunk.

So drunk did Jubal Rimmon get that night that he was unable to raise himself at one o'clock the next afternoon ; and he was in this con-

dition of splitting headache and abject wretchedness when David Rimmon entered the room where he was.

There was something grand about the look of David as he entered. Some men require the bitterest extremities which can befall them in order to bring to the fore that greatness of courage which has acted in their daily life as but the silent promoter of their gentle forbearings.

"Jubal," said David, with a grave dignity, surveying the handsome lad with the bloodshot eyes and tangled curls who was looking everywhere but at him, "Jubal," said David's steady voice, "we are to forgive up to seventy times seven——"

Jubal began to feel his head throbbing less. "The devil," he thought ; "it's going to be all right, then."

The next words threw a damper over him, however.

"But when we are forgiven, punishment follows us. Not that I feel I have any right to punish. Vengeance is not mine. I forgive you, Jubal, and I have not exposed you ; but you must leave my house, and win your bread for yourself, how you can."

Jubal's heart sank, and he groaned heavily.

"Shall I tell you the reason?" said David. "You have ruined me. You have been steadily and deliberately ruining me ever since I have taken you. I have always been remiss in looking at my accounts, knowing I had a good surplus at the bank. Would to God this had not been the case ! It might have saved you from this sin. But had you known precisely what was in the bank to my account when you presented that cheque, you could not have gone nearer to taking everything. I have not now money to pay my mill hands their wages due. The little I have invested cannot be called in at a minute's notice. In the meantime I must borrow or ——" but he did not finish his sentence. He left the room and inquired for Laura.

He would inquire a long time before he found her. She and her maid had quitted the house the night before, without leaving a message.

The discovery of all David had so recently learnt was truly appalling to him. Jubal had in fact not done this business by halves. It was frightful to contemplate the amounts he had from time to time added to his uncle's liberal allowance, by the commonplace device of imitating his signature. Jubal could not have spent it all ; of that David felt sure. He must have supplied others. David had believed his brother's method of training his son was wholly at fault, and that Jubal, treated in a totally different manner, with kindness and forbearance as the basis of every-

thing, would blossom into a prodigy of honour. Others have thought this ; but the seed of a thistle, be it never so well tended and cultured, will produce but a thistle. Truly David did not know which way to turn ; and he could not hide from himself the fact that Jubal had done nothing at all in the business, and was never likely to do anything. He had said to the man who had been sent to him from the bank, "It is all right," in such a tone of misery that the truth of the matter, with only one alternative, that of insanity, suggested itself to Mr. Franks. Jubal had proved himself a veritable thistle.

In the meantime Jubal had roused himself to make some preparation for going, he did not precisely know where. It was at this moment that he realised that he had offended everybody who could have helped him in his extremity, including his Aunt Dorcas. While he was packing up, a happy thought struck him. He would go and say good-bye to his uncle. Everything, even his attitude, should indicate his despair and his dejection. He would thank his uncle fervently for the great kindness and forbearance he had always shown towards him. In fact he would act such a little play as should take David's too-yielding heart by storm.

This thought gave him so much hope, that it was with considerable difficulty he brought his countenance to show the requisite amount of despair. David was sitting in the room he had formerly called his parlour, in an attitude of dejection and thoughtfulness, when Jubal softly opened the door and made a humble step into the room, then advanced no farther, but stood, hat in hand, his beautiful eyes only momentarily glancing at his uncle, and then drooping at once. David would have said something, but he could not begin.

Jubal himself opened the conversation. "I am come, sir," he began with a great show of humility, "to say good-bye to you, and to ask your pardon for the villainous way I have requited all your goodness to me." Here he choked a little. "We may never meet again on earth, sir ; I do not deserve that we ever should. But I shall think of you night and day, and try hard to live as you would have me, though you will never know." Jubal choked again. "And now," he concluded, stepping forward with great hesitation, "will you shake hands with me before I go?"

David, with swimming eyes, rose to his feet, and rushed upon his nephew, flinging his arms about him, and holding him convulsively. Then, under his strong emotion, he relapsed into his native dialect, "You mun stay wi' me, Jubal, we wonna talk o't again ;" and he fell to weeping aloud.

Jubal had not calculated on winning his day so easily as this, and was rather puzzled what to do with his victory. Moreover, to do him justice, it did touch him just a little, to see his uncle, who had been so deeply wronged, so ready to forgive. He managed to gasp out, in a blundering fashion, "Indeed, sir, you are too good to me. I will try to deserve it ;" and he half meant what he said.

"What do you call me 'sir,' for?" said David.

"I hardly deserve to call you 'uncle,' again," Jubal answered in a low voice.

After half-an-hour's talk of this broken and disjointed description, David became calmer.

"I suppose Laura has gone home to her father," said David.

"I suppose so," assented Jubal. "She and I had words, and I think she has gone home."

"You must try and be reconciled to her, Jubal. You ought to, you know, she is your wife."

But to this Jubal replied nothing at all.

David ordered in some refreshment ; and then said he must go and try to make arrangements to get money to pay his hands. Jubal dutifully offered to go with him. David was very glad to find that Jubal would take any kind of interest in his affairs. He began to feel cheerful in spite of his difficulties ; for if Jubal should gain in character by his misfortune, he would bear it very willingly. The two went out together, David's arm linked affectionately through Jubal's, to the amazement of the servants, who had never seen such a thing before.

When they had left the house, David spoke to Jubal about his sister, "I am sure that Kizzy has felt it," he began, "that you have never sent a message to inquire about her. She asked as soon as ever she was well enough, if you had made any inquiry, and she would have an answer. Her life was saved by a miracle, Jubal, even if she is out of danger now."

"Yes," said Jubal, penitently, "that's another of my sins. Should you mind my going to Leamington, uncle?"

David's eyes beamed. "My dear nephew," he said, affectionately, "what do I care for my own misfortune in this matter, if it is so to change you? Yes, go to Leamington, and be good to your sister."

"I might find it advisable, uncle, to go to the Saltrings'. I told you Laura and I had some words, and I suppose she is gone there."

David was so happy on seeing this change in Jubal that he would have consented to any plan. In fact, to hear Jubal speaking without a

rasp in his voice was something so new that, in itself, it would have ensured almost any concession. In the wide world few men can be found to forgive as David Rimmon could. If he forgave, it was to remember the sin against the pardoned one no more for ever. No wonder people thought David Rimmon a fool.

When Jubal was in the train for Leamington, David lingered about the carriage door, wondering and wishing that there might be something else he could do to show Jubal how he was feeling towards him. Jubal looked out of the carriage window with a subdued face, and his eyes met his uncle's in a franker manner than they had ever done in his life.

"What shall I tell Kizzy from you, uncle?" he asked.

"Tell her, I shall come to see her again when I have settled my business."

"Anything else?"

"I don't think so." He was feeling the truth of the saying that there is more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine that need no repentance; for Kizzy, to David's mind, had never gone astray, while Jubal had done little but stray.

Jubal presented himself at his brother-in-law's the morning after his arrival, not without some fear and trembling. Gerald Harwyn was the first person he saw, and despite the change in Jubal's looks, Gerald instantly recognized him, probably on account of Jubal's frame of mind at the time, which was more in harmony with his usual frame of mind when he had been a pupil at Lionel Harwyn's. Gerald had heard no particular good of Jubal since then, and consequently was not very cordial in his reception of him.

"I didn't think of seeing you, Mr. Harwyn," Jubal began in a conciliatory manner.

"It's not much to be surprised at nevertheless," replied Gerald drily, "seeing that I live here."

"It hadn't occurred to me. I have come to see my sister."

"There is a proverb," broke in another voice, which was that of Dr. Elworthy himself, who had just entered, "'Better late than never.' For my part I am inclined to the opinion that in some cases it is better never than late. I wonder you have the audacity to come, after the manner you have treated your sister," went on the doctor, warming. "During her delirium I have had to listen to a repetition of one conversation you had with her, I believe the last, until it has made my heart sick."

Keziah, however, was overjoyed to think that Jubal had come to see her. She had always loved this brother.

"Oh, Jubal," she exclaimed as he came into the room, "I can't tell you how glad I am that you've come."

There was light in the room now, and she feasted her eyes on him. He came forward with a bashful air, which had so long been foreign to him.

"I have had lots of dreams about you lately," went on Keziah, "but not one that you would care to see me ;" and she held him away from her and feasted her eyes. "I was always so fond of you, Jubal ; and we'll begin all over again and forget that we have ever quarrelled. Jubal, I had begun to think you really cruel, and that you would never come near me again. I was quite wrong. We ought to be good friends, you and I. There were only two of us."

Jubal felt that all these words were like so many thongs lashing him into a right path. He was conscious, as she held his hands, that she was giving him credit now for feelings he never felt. He was conscious, too, that to do anything but act the part planned out for him would make him look much more despicable than if he had never come at all. So he blundered out an apology, a regret, a hope or two, and then let his sister talk as much as she would. He felt very hot and uncomfortable, and wished himself out of the house. It would have been a great pleasure to him to tell her that he considered her husband a cur, and herself a creature of fancies and impulse, altogether to be despised for any practical value. It was quite possible for him, however, to liberate himself pretty soon on the excuse that he must look after his wife, who had gone away from him in a fit of temper. No doubt she had gone to Langton.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

COLLAPSE OF THE HOUSE OF RIMMON.

THE palatial residence and the Methodist cathedral were actually commenced. The foundation-stone of the cathedral had been laid by Mr. Furniss, M.P. for Jumley ; and there had been a great demonstration. St. Martha's Church steps had been crowded with spectators, causing no little annoyance to the vicar, who had come in person to remonstrate, but had received a Black Country reception, which is equally strong for or

against, as the occasion may require; and on this occasion it was against. It would have pleased Mr. Rimmon, could a foundation-stone of the palatial residence have been laid, too, with like display: but he could see no way of bringing this about.

Mrs. Rimmon had been in clover ever since Keziah's marriage. Joshua had hardly ever been angry with her. In fact, he was practising, wholesale, manners he thought befitting the palatial residence. He had gone mad upon this idea; and the more he dwelt upon his future magnificence, the more in his secret heart did he hanker after a reconciliation with Jubal, not, it must be owned, from any kindly or fatherly feelings, but from an ardent desire that the name of Rimmon should be perpetuated. He saw in the dim vista of future ages, Rimmons in Parliament; nay, more than this, Rimmons knighted; Rimmons made baronets; Rimmons advisers of the Throne; Rimmons lending to foreign countries and receiving their own again with high interest.

Although he had only thought this in the innermost sanctum of his heart and with all the doors shut, the wily Rimpler was aware of at least the direction his thoughts were taking, and awoke to the knowledge that this Rimmon property would slip through his fingers if he did not bestir himself. There was but one way to this end. He must possess himself of power to disestablish this owner of a future palatial residence; and he was certain in his own mind that Joshua Rimmon would rather lose all in this world than have his memory scouted and scorned when he had left it. So with a brain accustomed to keep facts in working order, he laid hands on the right article at once. Having heard from Joshua Rimmon that his brother David was at Leamington, and Jubal and Laura at Manchester, Mr. Rimpler espied the flood, and took it. He would have said that was the reason why he found Laura alone, for, with a kind of gambling spirit, he calculated that certain events most surely followed others.

He had possessed himself of more than he had expected. There was that other paper which had been so long in the possession of the grandmother; and Mr. Rimpler, reading that, had been thunderstruck. "It would transport him," he said. He had been carefully gathering up gold dust; and close to his hand had been valuable diamonds. He was being carried on to fortune, and the orderly brain, rather than any consciousness of his own, had told his feet to carry him to Springwoods' on business we have heard of. Since meeting Madeline at the wedding, he had reproached himself pretty genuinely, considering what a hardened

wretch he was, for having separated Madeline from her infant, and for telling her it was dead ; and he determined to trace it if possible. If he should ascertain that Madeline would care to possess the child, he would so far make reparation for the terrible wrong he had done her. He had come home, and learnt, almost without asking a question, the fate of the woman to whom his child and Madeline's had been consigned, and, more than this, he had learnt that Keziah Rimmon had adopted it. On hearing this he felt that something within him had claimed kinship with that infant in the old days when it had been an ill-used dependent of Hack-bit's, and it seemed to him a sort of happiness to be able to say to Madeline that the child she was so much attached to at the Saltrings' was her own. For himself he was glad that the child was not to be discovered in any of the slums he had to visit in the course of his work for Rimmon, but had been tenderly cared for and well and religiously brought up. The latter consideration could matter little to himself, but it might go a long way with Madeline. And then he smiled his own cunning smile, and thought to himself how he would take credit for this business, and tell Madeline he had known all along, and watched over the child. This intention he actually carried into effect later on, and won, as a reward, a kind womanly note from Madeline, which he took as a compliment to his great ability in lying.

At this point it only remained to him to "come a cropper," as he termed it, on Mr. Rimmon. He must first see the indication of a flood. He would not be precipitate. Had Jubal been more precipitate, he might have gained this day. Why he had delayed at the time of the flood, Silas Rimpler could not imagine. And the palatial residence and the Methodist cathedral grew side by side, and were centres of interest in the neighbourhood, and even in the county.

Mr. Rimpler, by dint of a keen scent, had discovered Toker, the man who signed the document which had been in old Mrs. Rimmon's possession. He, however, Mr. Rimpler found, had definite plans of his own, and showed no disposition whatever to aid him. Mr. Toker had been keeping his eye on Joshua Rimmon for many years, with only occasional intermissions during special absences at gold diggings and elsewhere. He had been an accomplice of Joshua Rimmon's in some piece of work that would not bear daylight, before his marriage. When his luck was "up," as he styled it, he was inclined to keep his mouth shut about what would "do for" them both. But he did not now care a brass farthing, he said,

what became of him. He had done other things since then, that would shut his mouth for ever, should he once get caught, which event, he prophesied, would come off very shortly. And it hurt his feelings, he said, to see that Joshua a-building of Methodist cathedrals, and he had made up his mind that he wouldn't leave the world himself, in an infamous manner, too, without turning Joshua out of the clover he was in. He explained this in a dogged and don't-care-ish manner to Rimpler. He had nothing to gain, he said, except spite.

"Does anyone else know this secret of yours and Mr. Rimmon's?"

"There's only one person in the world, I believe, knew about it, and that was his mother, and she's dead. She got a letter o' mine, I always think; anyhow, he never got it, and never dared ask her for it."

"What if the paper is in my possession?" Mr. Rimpler next observed.

"Look here," Mr. Toker replied, "I see the game you're at quite well, and I'm not going to help you to play it. I wouldn't 'a' told you this, except that I don't care a d—— for nothing now."

And from this point Mr. Rimpler found it impossible to move him. Neither could he get the least idea as to the means Mr. Toker meant to employ.

Mr. Rimpler was just returning one day from giving some directions, and viewing the progress of the palatial residence, when he met Mrs. Rimmon coming post-haste towards him. It was evident from her manner that something terrible had happened.

"Oh, Mr. Rimpler, do come home as quick'as you can," she said, "I don't know what has happened. He's awful."

"Who?" inquired Rimpler.

"Oh, Joshua; come on."

"What's the matter with him? He was all right when I came out."

"So he was; but a strange man came and saw him, and . . . he was very queer when he saw him. Well, I went into the dining-room, and Joshua, he stared at me like a wild thing, and I asks him what's the matter. And oh, Mr. Rimpler, he can't move and he can't speak, but I'm sure he knows everything."

A dreadful thought crossed Mr. Rimpler's mind. Had the man suddenly become paralysed without having signed the will he (Rimpler) had drawn up? He hurried to the scene as fast as his legs would carry him, leaving Mrs. Rimmon to follow as she could.

To his astonishment, on the threshold, whom should he meet just

arrived from Leamington, but Jubal. "How is he?" asked Rimpler of Jubal.

"Is anything up with him?"

"I believe he's paralysed."

The two rushed to the dining-room together. There sat Joshua Rimmon, with eyes fixed in an agonised stare and appeal that showed as plainly as anything that his intelligence was intact. First one addressed him, and then the other, but no sound was elicited from him, nor yet a movement. Silas raised one of Mr. Rimmon's arms. It fell like a log of wood when he loosed it. If ever eyes tried to talk, Mr. Rimmon's did.

A thought struck Mr. Rimpler, and he said to Jubal, "Don't you think you had better go for a doctor?"

"Oh, thank you," replied Jubal, "you had better go yourself, and leave me with him."

Mr. Rimpler said rudely, he should do nothing of the sort; but rang the bell, and ordered Sarah to go.

Mrs. Rimmon herself was upon that errand, though she was losing her way in a familiar road, owing to her frightened state of mind.

"I see you know what we are saying," said Jubal, in a high-pitched voice, to his father. "So it's all the same to me. You take your turn now of listening while I talk to you, you infernal hypocrite. I have known villains, and villains enough, since I left this cursed roof; but the most diabolical, hypocritical, and sneaking villain I have ever encountered has been my father. For my own existence I do not thank you. It has been a curse and not a blessing to me, considering the nature you endowed me with. I do not believe it is in my power to be good or honourable. When I was a child, I hated you. When I grew older and found you out, I despised you too. And what have I turned out now?" And Jubal laughed a scornful laugh. "I shall die on the gallows yet."

"Look here, young Rimmon," Mr. Rimpler broke in, "don't be so diabolical. What do you want to kick a man who is down for?"

"Oh, I like that," laughed Jubal, in a mad way. "Don't you talk to me about being diabolical, and about kicking people who are down. How many wretched hearths have you and he, and that infernal Hackbit, sold up? Hasn't he made every penny of his cursed money by kicking men who are down? I want him to know that I know all about his manner of getting his money, and that I have known it a long time, and all Jumley and all the world shall know it too. I see he understands me.

His memory shall be lifted on high, as a warning. He shall become a proverb."

Perhaps eyes can never show their true power of speaking until power of speech and movement are gone, while the intelligence remains. Mr. Rimmon said with his eyes, "Kill me, but say no more," as plainly as his voice could have spoken. "Put me out of my misery," his eyes kept pleading. Both Jubal and Silas Rimpler understood these eyes. Jubal, as if pushed on to tear his father limb from limb morally, by the arch-fiend himself, gloated over his father's agony, and replied to the look of the eyes—

"When did you ever spare me? What reason have I to spare you? You spread your ill-usage of me over years; I have to take my revenge in an hour. What shall make me stay my hand?"

Mr. Rimpler turned his face away, from sheer agitation, and closed his eyes to shut out the sight of Mr. Rimmon's anguish. "Look you, young Rimmon," he said, "drop it; he's bad enough, he's dead beat."

"Go to the devil," said Jubal, brutally. "You are only better than he is in one way; you are both of you devils, only you didn't pretend to be an angel of light. In the other world you talk about," he went on, addressing his father, "you'll go to your reward safe enough, and if I don't follow you to torment you after death, it shan't be my fault. But at least you shall do this much, you shall make a will, if I hold your hand that holds the pen, villain that you are."

Mr. Rimpler felt, and showed plainly in his face that he was himself utterly checkmated; he had never been so nonplussed in his life.

"Yes, you scoundrel, you shall do that at least," Jubal went on in mad passion; and he turned hurriedly to search for paper and a pen.

"I shall not witness it," said Mr. Rimpler, standing up sturdily, and he marched from the room; and that action of his, the result of disappointed ambition and anger, was the means of saving his life. By some strange chance the garden door opposite was open, and Mr. Rimpler abstractedly entered it, and marched about the gravel paths in an angry manner, and cast his eyes on one object after another.

Some one else happened to espy the open garden gate too. It was no other than Miss Dorcas. She entered, seeing Mr. Rimpler there.

"What is the matter, Mr. Rimpler?" she said. "People say they have seen Ann running about without any bonnet on."

But the answer to this question was never given. The earth appeared to rumble immediately under their feet. They started, in their terror,

and gazed at each other. A louder report followed, and the earth shook.

"Oh, God," cried Dorcas, pointing with her forefinger in a tragical manner, "it's the house;" and as they looked, the forepart of the building shuddered and fell with a mighty crash. A single shriek was heard. Yet another crash followed, and a chimney-stack was flung with immense violence into the garden gateway.

"If I believed in superstition," said Mr. Rimpler, in great agitation, "I should say it was the visitation of God."

"What are you muttering at?" demanded Dorcas, frantically. "Is anybody in the house?"

Another crash followed. The masonry which had been supported against the part that had just fallen, gave way, and the garden doorway was now completely blocked.

"Why don't you go out and see who's in the house?" cried Dorcas, wringing her hands.

"Will you have the goodness to tell me which way?" retorted Mr. Rimpler, angrily, "with that infernal glass all over the walls?"

"You a man!" sneered Miss Dorcas, "and afraid of a few cuts and scratches, to save human life!"

Mr. Rimpler was stung to the quick by this attack; but he could find no suitable reply. Soon there was a rush of feet, and a mighty sound of voices in the air. The falling of a house in the Black Country is a well-known sound, and soon collects a crowd.

"Who was in the house?" shrieked Dorcas, who had now some difficulty in making herself heard, such was the hubbub in the street outside the garden.

"Your brother and your hopeful nephew," replied Rimpler.

Miss Dorcas now clambered up on the fallen masonry that filled up the doorway, and peered out through a little aperture that was left.

"What can you see?" asked Mr. Rimpler, excitedly.

"Get up on the wall and find out for yourself," replied Miss Dorcas, spitefully.

"My brother's in the house," she then bawled from the aperture. "Get him out, can't you, if there's a man among you."

As a matter of fact there were not many men, for it was not a time at which the day-hands were out of the coal-mines, and the night-hands were asleep for the most part.

The few men that were there in the crowd of women knew better than

to risk their necks in a building that had shown such a tendency to sudden collapse.

A female figure now advanced along the road, accompanied by a doctor ; and when she saw what had taken place, she flung her arms into the air and shrieked aloud—"My poor mistress, where is my poor mistress?" That mistress was in the crowd, with eyes fixed and glassy, staring at the ruined house, when another mass of masonry fell.

"Which room was my brother in?" cried Dorcas, turning her head to where Rimpler was standing, frozen with fear, and expecting, as much as he ever expected anything in his life, that the ground would open under him next.

"They were in the dining-room," replied Mr. Rimpler, in a voice that sounded weak and unlike his own.

"Then Lord have mercy on them," said an outsider who had caught the words, "for they're buried fathoms deep," which language was very expressive if not accurate.

There appeared to be nothing for the crowd to do but to watch the loosened bricks fall one after the other or in masses.

"Why, who'd a thought this was undermined?" cried a voice in the crowd. "Mr. Rimmon's often said to me, as how his place, and the land by St. Martha's Church, and the other piece he's a-building on, were the only pieces in the neighbourhood he was sure of. He's a fool who ever buys a house in the Black Country, says I, for it's sure to be built like the house the Bible tells us on, on the sand. They may talk about knowing whether a place is undermined or not. But it's what nobody can say ; only it's more likely yes than no, when a house is in the middle of a coal-mine country, and it only wants a man to be a bit out of his calculation to make a cutting go under your house or not."

But even while the crowd, breathless, watched the ruin of the house, so familiar to them, another rumble and a crash were heard at a little distance. At this sound, Mr. Rimpler gave a yell. The noise did not frighten the populace as his yell did. Panic seemed to seize them ; they all rushed frantically from the spot, leaving the imprisoned Dorcas and Rimpler to do what they could.

Miss Dorcas, seeing Sarah moving away last of all, called out suddenly, "Sarah, good, kind Sarah, don't you think you could move some of this from before the door?"

"No, I don't, miss," said Sarah from the road, determinedly.

"But I'm here too," cried Mr. Rimpler. "Sarah, I'll give you a

sovereign when I come out. You're very strong, Sarah. If I were to help, don't you think you could move something?"

"Oh, you're there, are you?" cried Sarah, recognising the voice, but not seeing Mr. Rimpler.

"Yes, Sarah, I am here," replied the broken-spirited Rimpler; "and I never did you any harm," he added abjectly.

"Do you think she'll help you if she won't help me?" said Dorcas turning round and looking at him.

"You're in no danger there," said Sarah.

"I venture to doubt that," remarked Mr. Rimpler rather sharply.

"She's going away," cried Miss Dorcas to Rimpler, "she's actually going away, and there's nobody there now."

"Sarah," roared the despairing Rimpler. "I'll give you two sovereigns. Five! Ten! I've got it on me, I swear I have. Sarah," he fairly howled, "I'll marry you, I swear I will, if you'll let me out."

Sarah was too far off to hear this latter proposal. She was following her mistress, who had been taken into a neighbour's house.

Mr. Rimpler began to think seriously of climbing the glass-covered wall if he could by any means. He mounted a rockery, but even then there was a height equal to that of his entire body above him; the rockwork gave way, and he tumbled backwards, which occurrence was greeted by Dorcas with a laugh of derision.

A considerable time passed, during which Mr. Rimpler sat down on a stone to await death, and occupied himself in tearing up all his private notes into minute fragments, which act of folly he intensely regretted some time afterwards.

After a while the crowd began to gather outside again; but nobody seemed to think of liberating those who were in the garden.

"What was the other noise?" cried Miss Dorcas to the crowd in general.

She was answered in so deafening a manner that she was unable to gather what was shouted. Mr. Rimpler, however, caught the words. "It's a visitation," he cried, "I declare it's a visitation."

Incredible as it may seem, the other sound had been produced by the falling of what was built of the Methodist cathedral and palatial residence. It was a coincidence, that was all. To this day, however, the Black Country people look upon this catastrophe as the direct work of the hand of God; and not a man could be found, much less a woman or child, who would venture to make use of any of the rubbish thus

spread upon the ground. To this day it remains ; a single brick has never been carted away.

But to return to Mr. Rimpler. On hearing the cry of the crowd, so convinced was he that Heaven was punishing the outrageous wickedness of that house, that he felt there could be no escape for him, and he determined to die game.

"We can die but once," he remarked to Dorcas.

"And after death the judgment," she added consolingly. "But we're in no danger of dying here, you fool."

Mr. Rimpler felt like a man charged with a revelation, as he replied ominously, "We are all doomed."

"Speak for yourself, please," rejoined Dorcas from her elevation "They've been trying to move the stones, but they're wedged that fast, it would want an 'Ercules to move them. But we shall get out all right if you've got any patience."

It must be recollected that Miss Dorcas had been brought up amongst this sort of thing, whereas to Mr. Rimpler it was a very unpleasant novelty. Certain words he had heard Joshua Rimmon read in the disagreeable prayer-times which had been inflicted upon him came vividly into his mind ; and like a prophet who speaks not from choice, but from inward compulsion, Mr. Rimpler cried solemnly, "Whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I fly to the uttermost parts of the earth, I cannot escape." He could not recollect the passage correctly, but he remembered the spirit of it.

Dorcas now became very anxious to get out on her own account, for she imagined herself shut up in the garden with a madman ; and she again appealed to the crowd. But it was a matter of great difficulty for them to dislodge the stones, however much they might be disposed to do so ; and it was not till dark in the evening that a way was made for the imprisoned pair through the *débris*.

As for the house of Rimmon itself, that was not interfered with. Black Country people knew better than to meddle with a place that might not have done falling, more especially as there could not by any possibility be any one alive in it to rescue.

When Dorcas had passed through the aperture, a figure was seen to follow her rapidly, and then to disappear ; and from that hour Mr. Rimpler was never seen nor heard of at Jumley.

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE LAST.

SOME weeks later Keziah was made aware of what had occurred. The knowledge of it had been carefully kept from her till she should be stronger. Elworthy then only told her such details as were absolutely necessary.

The bodies of her father and brother lay beside that of Keziah's first husband in Jumley cemetery. Mrs. Rimmon had ever since been at the Berediths'. Mrs. Beredith herself had fetched her as soon as she had heard of the catastrophe, and with her had brought the faithful Sarah, who had refused with many tears to be separated from her mistress.

On Keziah's inquiring about Laura, Elworthy told her a plain fact, and her name was not afterwards mentioned between them. She had not gone home to her father; she had quitted England in company with Winterfold.

What Elworthy did not tell Keziah was that the iron safe in which Mr. Rimmon kept his papers had been extricated from the ruin, and that in it had been discovered sufficient evidence of Joshua's preposterous hypocrisy and wickedness. This had somehow got bruited about, and was in everybody's mouth, and a frightful scene had occurred in the cemetery at the interment; for Black Country people when roused to indignation become savage. They came by hundreds into the cemetery and dragged the coffin from the bearers, dragged it ignominiously along the gravel path, and would have burst it open and torn the corpse limb from limb had it not been for a special body of police ordered to the spot by the forethought of the officiating minister, who had, before the funeral, had sufficient warning that something of this nature might be expected.

A special watch was kept at the grave day and night, during the first fortnight after the interment, till the spirit of indignation and mad passion had had time to cool a little.

A will was discovered in the iron safe, leaving everything absolutely to Keziah, and nothing to Mrs. Rimmon. Elworthy told his wife this, but added, "And I know my Kizzy won't blame me when I tell her that in her name I have absolutely refused the money. It could never prosper. Your uncle David and I have talked it out together, and we are both resolved not to touch a penny of it."

"Oh, I am so glad of that," said, Keziah, earnestly, "it would be sure to bring a curse with it. What will become of it?"

"That can matter very little to us, Kizzy," her husband replied. "And now my precious one," he said caressingly, "all those who love you best have been talking things over, and we all think it will be much better if you, and I, and the bairn, and your mother, go right away, where no one knows anything of these miserable things that have happened."

Keziah looked far away, and remained silent for a few minutes, and then, heaving a sigh, she fell to kissing Leonard, who was on her knee; then looking up at her husband, asked him, "Where shall we go?"

"Should you be afraid of going a long way, Kizzy?"

"How can I be afraid of going anywhere with you?" she asked, almost in an injured tone.

"Well then, Kizzy, there's a splendid opening for me at Sydney, and I am not without means. And [Gerald Harwyn has bought my practice here, which gives me some more money in hand."

"What does mamma say about it?" Keziah asked.

"She is quite willing to go anywhere," Elworthy replied; "and I ought to tell you," he added with a smile, "that two faithful allies of yours insist on accompanying us, so we shall be quite a party. Both Sarah and Wilson refuse to be left behind, and I have promised to take them on condition that you consent to the plan."

A couple of years later on, a traveller returned home to England—no other in fact than young Edmond Saltring, now such a bronzed, whiskered fellow as to be unrecognisable—was recounting to a group of interested listeners at his father's table stories of his and Harry's exploits, and news of friends. "I had no idea I should meet any one I knew at Sydney," he was saying. "And I got one surprise after another. I was walking along the High Street, when I saw, coming towards me, Keziah Rimmon—I beg her pardon, Mrs. Elworthy—and she doesn't look a day older. She had two beautiful children with her, Leonard, you know, and a little girl, whose name was Lucy Maud, she told me. I had never even heard that they had settled there. She made me promise to go home with her to see the doctor and the others. I had no sooner got into the room, mother," he said, addressing her especially, "than I heard Mr. Rockingham's voice. Yes; he was there, and Madeline, and Bertram. They are actually settled there."

"Really now," said Mr. Saltring, "to think of your having come across them ; and nobody here knows where they are, for Mr. Rockingham gave up all his family, to stick to his niece."

"But why have they got Bertram with them?" asked Edmond of his father. "I thought he was living with Keziah, until it was time for them to go home."

"Madeline took a great fancy to him," said Mr. Saltring a trifle brusquely, "and Keziah gave him up to her, or rather, I should say, we did."

"And I wonder you never wrote to tell us that Dr. Elworthy and all of them had gone to Sydney. Dr. Elworthy has got a splendid practice ; and I must not forget to tell you that Mrs. Rimmon looks positively young. And you know the two servants they took out with them ; well, Wilson's with them now ; and she just worships little Maud. But as for Sarah, she's actually married."

"Well, I wouldn't have believed that Sarah could have left them," said Mrs. Saltring in the tone of a woman who has received a great shock to her confidence in human nature.

"Ah" said Edmond, "I thought I should take you in. She has married the doctor's coachman, if you please, and they both live in the house. And who do you think is on her way out, just for a six months' visit?"

"Oh, we know all about that," said Mrs. Saltring. "And we think it would be all the better if Mrs. Towers settled out there with them, for she has been like one lost ever since Keziah went away."

"Well, why don't you suggest it to her, and, perhaps, she will?" said Edmond.

"It's no go, my boy ; Layton has tried that game," said Mr. Saltring. "She can't leave that grave ; and Layton told me that she would not even go on a visit to her friend without an absolute promise from him that if she should die while away, her body should be brought back and laid by her husband."

"So Dr. Towers and his sister have taken quite a sociable turn, have they?" as if reverting to a subject that had been mentioned before.

"Yes, I can assure you, they are quite an acquisition. They have even taken to entertaining."

"And who is the new parson here, now Mr. Rockingham's gone?"

"Oh the Rev. Brougham Banner got the living, and has greatly improved."

"And is Jody Waddy still above ground?"

"Oh yes, but he's off duty. Mr. Rockingham pensioned him. And last night as I walked through the churchyard, I saw him walking, as he said, round his bit of 'garding,' smoking his little pipe; and he remarked to me with considerable pride, that the new sexton would have to dig a good while afore he'd made as many graves as he had."

"And what has become of Jubal's uncle David?" Edmond asked.

"Oh, he was in low water for a little time," said Mr. Saltring. "I expect that Jubal was an expensive article. But he has quite got over that. And they say he spends a part of every day in writing to Keziah."

"And Jubal's aunt Dorcas, does she live at Jumley now?"

"Oh, yes. She stood her ground in spite of everything. She said she wasn't going to flee the country as if she was a villain and a malefactor. They say she has made a nice nest-egg for herself, but she still keeps on the shop. But now, let us change the subject; tell me some more about Harry and yourself. We are so proud of the way you have been getting on. It will be time for you to be going back again to Australia before we've heard half what we want to hear."

"And what will Maud say when she comes?" said a laughing girl with rebellious black ringlets to a husband who was smiling down on her as if she were the most wonderful thing in creation.

"She will say I have grown dreadfully matronly," went on Kizzy, with a pout of her ripe lips. "I'm afraid I shall grow stout." And truly, as her husband looked at her, he did see a plump roundness of outline which was very pleasant to behold and spoke volumes as to her contentment, as did the pretty dimples that had found their way somehow to her face. But Keziah's eyes, always so beautiful in her stormy days, how lovely had they grown in her new life!

"I used to say," observed Dr. Elworthy, gently and proudly stroking the black curls, "that your beauty yet lacked something. I know now that it was happiness."

"And yet," said Kizzy, growing serious in a moment, and the dark eyes looking brighter for gathering tears, "it would have been so much better, dear husband, to have deserved all the happiness we have! We did so many foolish things and so many wrong ones. What a God it must be to have taken pity on us, and given us heaven!"

"The past is not ours," replied her husband, sadly; "the present is. There is no remedying past wrong, nor any balancing of accounts

before the great Providence. That is the one hope for such as you and me."

"Do you think, Rupert," asked Kizzy, earnestly, "that one can blot out one's past sins by watching over others, and preventing their like fall?"

"No, my Kizzy," he said, shaking his head sadly. "God only can do that. Yet go on doing your work, Kizzy; for that is right for to-day."

"I cannot but do what you call 'my work'," cried the girl, her face growing cheerful in a moment, and covered with rippling sunshine. "If my happiness could not come out somehow, I should die of it, I think. And you," she went on, saucily tossing her head, "are trying to kill me of it, just, I believe, to punish me for having kept you so long from me."

"I understand all that now, Kizzy," he said; "even that was all your noble nature. You would punish yourself. You know now, don't you, dear, that punishment and reward are not ours to deal with? But there is Lucy calling."

In a moment, at that call, Kizzy had left her husband's side, and as she passed through the door with a light step her husband gazed after her, and thought—"Worth all the waiting! Worth all the nursing! To have that noble heart at last, for ever and for ever with me."

But if her husband blessed her, so did others. She poured out upon that city the sunshine of her smiles, the healing balm of a great loving heart, set free from its own turmoil to take in that of all the world. And if she were called an angel there, she had been called an angel before, in her sorrowful days. Yet, what would those colliers have thought, had they seen this Kizzy, born among them, bred among them, and of them, shining as she now shone, in happy wifehood, in noble motherhood? It is a mercy they did not see her. They might have learned idolatry. A creature at once so beautiful and so good would have seemed to them divine. They would have prayed to her.

THE END.



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